

Holt of Deathfield

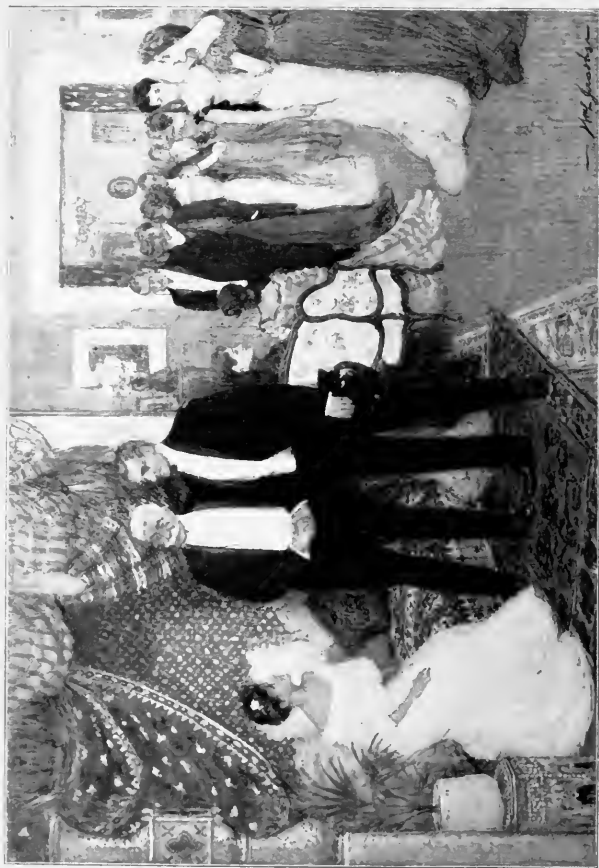
CAROLINE ATWATER
MASON 

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HOLT OF HEATHFIELD





"MURRAY HOLT APPROACHED WITH AN APOLOGY FOR COMING AT SO LATE AN HOUR."

HOLT OF HEATHFIELD

BY

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AUTHOR OF "A WOMAN OF YESTERDAY," "A MINISTER OF
THE WORLD," "A WINDFLOWER," "A LILY OF
FRANCE," "THE LITTLE GREEN GOD," ETC.

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HOLT OF HEATHFIELD

CHAPTER I

THE COMPTONS AND CUSHIERS

AT midday of a mid-June Sunday a stream of people issuing from the Old North Church on the Broad Street of Heathfield showed that divine service had closed.

Broad Street, at this end of the town, was a wide and quiet avenue shaded by stately old trees. The church, a gray stone edifice, builded on admirable lines and lifting an ivy-fretted Norman tower against the sky, stood back from the street and was approached by a shady walk passing between lines of arbor-vitæ hedge. A wide stretch of velvety turf at the right was bounded by the manse, an ecclesiastical dwelling-house of gray stone, united to the church by a cloisterlike gallery possessing

a series of mullioned arches. The manse, as well as the church and cloister, was luxuriantly embossed with ivy. The sun shone upon its myriad glossy leaves and the light wind stirred them softly. Over the whole scene rested a peculiar half-delicious, half-torturing sense of charm. It reminded one vaguely of many other scenes. Travelled folk were wont to say that it was all like a lovely corner of some old English cathedral close.

Drawn up at the curb in front of the church stood a shining closed carriage with a spirited pair of bays and liveried coachman and footman. A handsome man of thirty-two or more was waiting with manifest impatience on the pavement near at hand. His Prince Albert coat was buttoned closely about a figure whose elegance of proportion inclined slightly to embonpoint. Just behind his carriage stood an unpretentious open surrey with one staid family horse held by a driver whose only mark of livery was his beaver hat. These two alone were now left of a long line of equipages which had awaited the close of service.

A stout gentleman with a ruddy face and heavy white mustache, paused as he came down the path from the church door to return the deferential greeting of the man by the carriage.

“Good morning, Compton,” he said, halting with an abrupt but gracious half-military salute. “Mr. Holt’s value rises mightily when he sends another man to preach, heh?”

“It certainly does, Mr. Binney,” returned the younger man, smiling with hearty acquiescence; “we are getting spoiled, I believe.”

The elderly gentleman walked on. His home was just beyond the church, a plain, substantial mansion. The men who had just exchanged greetings represented the two powerful manufacturing interests of Heathfield. Mr. Binney had created his own wealth. Mr. Laurence Compton had inherited his business and its great income from his father, who had been dead several years.

Left alone now, as the stream of worshippers issuing from the church had almost ceased, Mr. Laurence Compton kept his eye somewhat

steadily directed toward two figures which remained still standing upon the broad stone steps. Seen down the vista formed by the stiff, dark lines of the hedge, and set against the gray stone of the church, these two figures, which were alike graceful and girlish, made a picture pretty enough to disarm the impatience of a man who has gone to church unwillingly only to find it more of a bore than he expected, a man who is in haste to get back to his cool veranda, his cigar, and his Sunday papers.

As if drawn by the persistent gaze fixed upon them, the two young ladies slowly descended the steps. As they passed down the church walk, they glanced back at a group of dowagers in goodly apparel of satin, lace, and discreetly unostentatious diamonds, who were still engaged in earnest conversation just within the open doors.

Of the two girls one was tall, a demi-blonde, with smooth chestnut hair, fine, wide-open eyes, impassive in their expression; the other was small and slight, with irregular

features, dark eyes full of arch roguery, and brown hair which was brushed in curly confusion away from a low forehead. Hair and head in their captivating individuality of piquant grace were framed in by a broad black hat brim which, like the black gown, was of gauzy transparence. At her belt was a handful of pale pink roses. Her companion was faultlessly attired in turquoise and white after a style which warned the observer of a French modiste, exclusive styles, and prohibitive prices.

Both Cecilia Compton and Gladys Cushier would have been called by the gentleman who awaited them at the carriage door "thoroughbred."

Both had breeding palpably and blood possibly; of that one could not be so sure in a country where aristocracy is made so rapidly. In face and figure, in raiment and bearing, in their sinuous slenderness and delicate curves, dwelt the fine fragrance of physical perfectness. There was, however, a subtle difference in the quality of the two. Belong-

ing to both, a defect indeed of their caste and their condition, was a nuance of unconscious insolence. In the blonde maiden it arose from the claims of material advantage; in her friend, from a sense of inherited social distinction.

"At last!" exclaimed the gentleman-in-waiting, removing his hat with ironical gallantry. "I thought perhaps you had concluded to take up your abode in the sanctuary."

"It does not make any difference, Larry," replied the tall, fair girl, with a shade of petulance, "whether I come or not as long as mother stays behind talking."

"You mean adoring!" exclaimed her friend. "They have been adoring their Creator for an hour, and now they are adoring their pastor for another. Does it always take so long?"

"Always," remarked Mr. Laurence Compton. "Did you hear what kept Mr. Holt away from service, Cecil?" he asked his sister, adding, "it strikes me as rather a cavalier proceeding, this non-appearing act of his. I think I will try it next Sunday."

"It's all about that dreadful accident at the works last night, you know," exclaimed Miss Compton, plainly troubled.

"What business is that of Holt's?" asked her brother, quickly.

"Why, they have to administer extreme unction or something, don't they, in those cases?" interposed Gladys Cushier — Glee, she was always called among her friends. Even in this solemn suggestion her irrepressible roguishness was discernible.

"Glee! Extreme unction by a Protestant minister, — you are dreadful!"

"What — did one of those poor fellows die?" asked Mr. Laurence Compton, abruptly. He frowned as he spoke, and his smooth-shaven, smooth-featured face changed perceptibly.

"Yes," said his sister, gravely. "It is worse than that. Two of them died during the night; the other, they say, is alive still, but he simply will not let Mr. Holt go out of his sight for a moment, so you see he had to send Mr. Parrish to preach."

"I see," said her brother, soberly. "I must send my check at once. Sad enough, surely. Very decent of Holt to stand by the poor men," and he passed his gloved forefinger musingly up and down his chin. A moment of silence fell and then, glancing up with a shade of embarrassment, Compton said, "Yes, Holt is a fine fellow, a very fine fellow."

"Dear me, Larry, have you got it too?" exclaimed Gladys Cushier, willing to change the theme of their casual comment to one of a lighter nature. "I did not expect it of you."

"What did you not expect, charming Glee?" asked Compton, with a swift change of tone and a half-caressing smile down upon her.

"That you should join the adorers' chorus," was the reply, with a slight deepening of her color. "I hoped for one friend, at least, left me. Not one word have I heard since the day I came home from college that was not of or from, to or about, that everlasting parson, the Reverend Murray Holt! I had it even at college. One of the girls knew him at Prince-

ton and talked of him whenever she could find any one to listen to her."

"Haven't you seen him yet, Glee?" asked Cecil Compton, in surprise.

"I have not! Thus far my life has failed of that supreme crisis. I not only have not seen the new minister, the 'bland, passionate, deeply religious,' and also unmarried Mr. Holt, but I can say in simple sincerity that I do not want to."

"That will do very well to start with," said Compton, smiling sardonically, "but I will bet you a hundred roses you will be one of the worst cases in town before summer is over."

"Laurence Compton," protested Glee, "you ought to know me better! I have a rooted antipathy to 'the cloth' — isn't that what you call it? — to begin with, to every genus and species of it except the currant-colored that the popes wear. But these petted and pious athletes with expressive eyes and æsthetic tastes who talk of sacrifice and devotion and yet grasp every luxury that comes their way;

the kind whose only achievement is to trail around a lot of feminine admirers after them ; above all things those young divines who go in for an air of studied coldness and indifference, as I hear your Mr. Holt does, in order to keep us girls from breaking our hearts, — honestly, there is no type of man I so thoroughly detest ! ”

“ You have not seen him yet,” said Cecil, significantly. She was looking back at the group of dowagers, who had now reached the middle distance, but had stopped again. Her brother seemed to have lost his eagerness to start, and was listening to Glee’s extravagant nonsense with sympathetic amusement, while the horses fretted and pawed incessantly.

“ Is he so terribly handsome ? ” cried the girl, impatiently.

“ Homely as the dickens ! ” said Compton, with slow emphasis. “ Ah ! ” turning suddenly at a sound of rustling silk, “ the ladies have finished their little praise service ! ”

Then, disregarding the footman, he assisted into the carriage a delicate, gray-haired lady,

his mother, and that done hastened to place Mrs. Cushier in the waiting surrey. She was noticeably younger, a dark-eyed, energetic, and active matron in the late forties.

As Glee took her seat beside her mother in the easy open carriage, Laurence Compton lingered, with his eyes upon her face full of unconcealed admiration.

"And you fly off again to-morrow!" he said regretfully. "It isn't fair. Mrs. Cushier, can't you cage this wild little bird of ours and hold her fast for a while?"

Mrs. Cushier shook her head with an indulgent laugh at the note of proprietorship in Compton's question.

"But you know, Larry," replied Glee, a slight confusion evident for all her ready habit of speech, as she met his look, "I shall be at home always after this, and I promised the girls so long ago."

"Oh, this is the Cape Cod house-party scheme, is it?"

"Yes, there will be eight of us girls all alone for one week."

"Men ruled out entirely?"

"Absolutely."

"Perhaps then by the time you return you will be willing to look upon the face of an old neighbor."

Compton's hat was in his hand. He had already retreated from the surrey. Cecil was calling him to hasten. The horses would not stand another minute.

"It is just possible!" nodded Glee, with her smile which was like a flash of light.

Compton sprang into his own carriage, facing his mother and sister; the footman closed the door with a sharp click, climbed to his place, and at last the horses could start. An instant more and the surrey was abreast of the closed carriage. Compton leaned from his window, then made a swift sign to Glee to look backward.

"The Young Divine!" he murmured with a look of mock impressiveness.

Glee held her head loftily and straight, refusing to turn, and both carriages rolled on.

Up the street, approaching the church, a tall, broad-shouldered man in a gray flannel suit was coming, a man with a homely, rough-hewn face, haggard in the noon light from his night's vigil, and even grim.

CHAPTER II

MURRAY HOLT

MURRAY HOLT crossed the stretch of lawn before his house with long strides, and the air of a man who seeks to escape interruption. In this purpose he was not, however, successful.

Two ladies, one of middle age in faultless mourning costume, the other young and girlish in virginal white, had hovered at the church entrance, after all others had left. As if they had been awaiting Holt's advent, they now moved promptly to the point where they could intercept his progress. With an air of deepest concern the older lady put a number of questions to her pastor, regarding the fate and sufferings of the victims of the recent explosion. These questions being briefly answered, a new set was introduced with a note of even more sincere anxiety.

"And how *is* our dear Mrs. Fisher? Is it

true that Dr. Cushier says there may be malarial conditions in the manse? There cannot be any danger of typhoid, can there? But how very distressing at best! Will you not, Mr. Holt, come home to dinner with us? The house must be so comfortless! Dear Mrs. Fisher is such an indispensable creature!"

These exclamations and questions, which followed one another in smooth and rapid succession, were bracketed by Mr. Holt, and answered inclusively by the brief statement that he had not been at home since Saturday afternoon, before the explosion occurred, and did not know his housekeeper's present condition. He had not supposed it to be serious. He must decline the proffered hospitality with thanks. Not waiting for a fresh subject to be introduced, he then somewhat unceremoniously broke away from the solicitude of his parishioners, and in another moment the door of the manse closed upon him.

The young girl flushed. Her mother sighed as they turned back to the path. "Dear man!" she said, "he was very abrupt, even

brusque at times, was he not? But it seemed after all to fit that tremendous moral earnestness, — to be one of the defects of his qualities, don't you know? and all that. One could forgive such a man anything!"

Holt, coming from the dazzling sunlight, groped his way through the darkness of the closed house and entered a great dim room at the left of the entrance. The Gothic windows with their stained glass panes gave an ecclesiastical tone to the interior which was otherwise that of a conventional drawing-room, grave and dignified in its appointments, but full of subdued richness.

On the shining mahogany table Holt noticed a great brass bowl of exquisite fresh roses, and lying beside it was a little heap of notes in square envelopes of faint tints and varying sizes, which had arrived during his absence. All were addressed in feminine handwriting. The unimportance of their contents he knew as well as if he had read them, in effect, — the delicate questions in casuistry, the artificial self-accusings, the flattering tributes to him-

self, the invitations to social events. Holt threw his straw hat upon the sofa and stood for a moment looking with a strange expression at the table, and from it with an odd, measuring glance at the walls and furnishings of the room.

He was six feet and a little over; a big, overgrown fellow, not more than twenty-seven, with a healthy and vigorous leanness of limb and breadth of shoulder; a man not awkward, but clearly not graceful. His hair was nearly red, and he had the sensitive skin which belongs to that coloring, freckled across the high cheek bones, and reddened by sunburn, but white as milk on forehead and throat. His brows were straight and well defined, the eyes clear green-gray, the features rough hewn but indicative of force and firmness. The mouth indeed at the moment had a dogged set, and the whole face, which bore traces of a sleepless night, indicated an unpleasant intensity of preoccupation.

His first movement now was to grasp the whole unopened, slippery heap of notes,—

blue, mauve, pearl, and cream tinted,—and fling them with a quick, well-directed motion into the empty grate behind a low, embroidered screen. He looked viciously next at the roses, as if he had an impulse to fling them after the notes, then bit his lip and stood frowning harshly.

The truth was, Murray Holt was fighting with a mighty impulse to tear up the soft carpets on which he stood and tread bare boards; to hurl down, with the fierce brutality of the old iconoclasts, the shining vases on his mantel, the richly framed copies of delicately sensuous Botticellis and della Robbias from his walls; to make a Pyramid of Vanities then and there after the counsels of Savonarola—to reduce himself, in fine, to the level of the surroundings which he had but now left.

For the first time in his life it had been given the young clergyman to know what life in its hard reality was to hundreds of the people about him, and the impact of that reality served for the moment to produce a deadly loathing of the refinements and luxuries of his

own life, which he had hitherto taken as a matter of course. Hence the half-insane passion which was raging now within him as he thought of the wretched tenement he had left in its sordid, squalid meanness. The soiled and tattered bed on which he had helped to lay one shattered body, that of an "unskilled laborer," came before him. The ill-smelling sink was close by, and the uncovered table with its ugly cups and plates of stained and cracked earthenware. In a broken chair sat the wife, hard-featured and toil-worn, her roughened hands clasped somewhat primly in her lap, tears running down her cheeks, but a certain curious trace of self-importance visible on her mouth. A neighbor was telling her that the Company would surely pay for her husband's funeral expenses, and the sense of coming for a short moment into view as "the widow of a victim of the sad disaster," and of thus being an object of consideration, even by the great mysterious Company itself, was plainly of no small power to soothe her grief.

The other wife had been of quite another strain. Tearless and sullen, she had confronted with bitterness those who suggested to her the same source of consolation.

"Yes, no doubt!" she had cried, turning from the dead body which she would let no one but herself approach, "when they have blown up my poor lad with their wicked machinery, they will come here with pious faces and tell me it is the Lord's will, and I must be grateful to them for putting him out of my sight under the ground. Oh, Jim!" and the wail into which she had broken sounded still in the young man's ears, and he thought would never cease to sound.

That had been in the gray dawn. He had come from the place, that wail still piercing his ears, and down the grimy street to another poor abode, and from this he had only a half-hour since departed. Here lay, agonized and mutilated, a young gunsmith of gigantic frame, barely twenty-four years old. It was comparatively a comfortable house, for its master, having a trade, was lifted above the

poverty line. There were half a dozen rooms, kept tidily, and the thrifty young wife, with her two babies, was comely and quiet. But as he sat, hour after hour by the bedside, where the instinct of life was waging its hard battle, Holt learned by heart what life meant to such as these.

Small signs revealed to him the intimate meaning of poverty, vague and undefined before. To have a few sheets and towels was plainly a matter for congratulation to the wife; to have none in reserve, a matter of course. To hear her sigh for such alleviations and appliances for sickness as he would have supposed indispensable, but to patiently plan to do without them as wholly out of reach,—this had touched his spirit with keen compunction, and emptied his purse of its last dollar. It had never occurred to him before that baths and water-bags, abundant linen, and such like necessities, were costly luxuries to many people. He supposed everybody had them naturally. Then the kindness of those people toward each other had its

own irresistible pathos. Every neighbor came with something to offer out of her poverty, and the men in their wordless, heavy sympathy, moved him most.

The young man's mother, coming from her own house, had sat by the window, apparently apathetic, all through the night, with a face livid like the face of death. It was whispered that she was suffering physical agony of a quite indescribable degree, the paroxysms of an internal and hopeless disease. "She always has her spells," her son's wife said quietly, "when she gets overdone, and she has mopped out the factory now three days running. It's real heavy work. She hadn't ought to do it, not with cancer in the stomach, you know."

Decidedly not, Holt had murmured, with an irrepressible groan, man though he was, growing wan with the thought.

As the night wore on, he had looked with a certain curiosity at his surroundings. The little tenement was tidy and clean, but it had no soft carpets nor cushioned couches,

nor embroidered pillows; the walls were bare, save a gaudy chromo without a frame, and a marriage certificate in a frame of fading gilt; there was a table in the front room which boasted a red cloth, a painted plate, and an album. Plainly, however, this was considered a tasteful and comparatively luxurious interior. This young couple had "had it easy" so far in life, all the neighbors said. The gunsmith got good wages and they were paying for their half of the house little by little "at the loan." If this should be accomplished, Holt perceived, the ultimate height of life would have been attained. There was nothing beyond. Perhaps this perception gave him a keener pang than any other. He had talked much himself of "the strenuous life," and he now realized that he had never known it. He could work hard in his own way, but he could always return at will to the associations and belongings of ease and luxury. Intellectual intercourse, art, poetry, travel, music, flowers, shining cleanliness, delicate food,—all these

things had belonged tacitly, unconsciously, to his scheme of things. At this moment he hated them all with a blind, boyish, unreasoning revulsion inevitable to an untried nature, at once profoundly earnest and absolutely honest.

It was not that Holt had never seen poverty and suffering before. He thought he knew them well. He had come to the Old North Church of Heathfield, indeed, because he was told that, while the two great manufacturers, Mr. Binney and Mr. Compton, were among its members, the church in its tone was somewhat democratic, and might give a man a chance to do something toward bridging the chasm between rich and poor. Heathfield had changed in these later years from a quiet residence town to something of a manufacturing centre, and the population among the operative class was rapidly increasing, and to some extent was altering the social life of the Old North Church.

The costly luxury of the manse was none of Holt's choosing. He had found his resi-

dence ready furnished by the church when he came to Heathfield less than a year before. He could not withhold appreciation of what had been done for him, and until the present hour he had enjoyed with little question the rich, harmonious dignity and beauty of his abode. He was experiencing now the fierce, hand-to-hand grip of that which he had only seen at a distance before — the grim facts of labor and poverty, the world's width between luxury and want.

With face growing stern and gray, and his hands cold and interlocked hard behind him, he turned on his heel and began to pace the room. Steps were heard in the hall outside, and some one knocked at his door. Opening the door Holt found himself confronted by a man far below his own height, of delicate build, with keen, discerning eyes, well-cut features, and a short, carefully trimmed gray beard.

“Oh, Dr. Cushier,” he said without a smile. “How is Mrs. Fisher? Will you come in?”

"No, thanks. She will have to keep still for a week or two probably. It is malaria. How are you, Mr. Holt? You look rather done for yourself. It was a bad affair down at the works." The doctor looked keenly at his pastor while speaking.

"I am all right, thank you," said the other, briefly.

"This illness of Mrs. Fisher makes it a little awkward for you here," persisted the doctor, kindly. "Come up to our house for a few days. We shall be alone this week; Gladys is off again to-morrow."

"Thank you, Doctor, I am afraid I could not manage it."

"Then come to dinner to-morrow night, at least; I won't take no for an answer to that."

"All right. Very well. I'll come."

As the doctor left the house, well knowing that Holt accepted his invitation only to free himself from his persistence, the young man threw himself upon a broad sofa, and in another moment was heavily asleep.

The doctor as he crossed the lawn was say-

ing to himself; "We shall have to keep an eye upon you, young man. You are worse off at this minute than your housekeeper. I always held that that house might not be healthy. That mediæval business is very pretty for a photograph, but it's death on folks."

CHAPTER III

A LITTLE HARMLESS FAMILY FRICTION

"I HOPE you will enjoy your walk," said Mrs. Cushier to the trim nurse who passed her on the shaded veranda, a parasol in one hand and a large basket in the other. With a composed smile and words of thanks the nurse turned and tripped down the long walk to the gate, proceeding in the direction of Heathfield.

The Cushiers' house, a low, rambling brown cottage with a square tower, and a picturesque red roof, was set in a charming, old-fashioned garden, just at the outer limits of the town. From the level of this garden rose a low hill on which stood a white and shining Italian villa, very new and very large, the Compton residence, whose marble-pillared loggia looked down upon the square brown

tower in which Gladys Cushier had her own bright and breezy chamber.

Mrs. Cushier wore her bonnet and she also carried a parasol. It was July, and the early afternoon was uncomfortably warm. In the open door of the house, in a cool white gown, stood her daughter Gladys. Mrs. Cushier was flushed and anxious. Her daughter was neither, but there was a touch of determination in the little upward tilt of her chin.

"I cannot quite see, dear mamma," she said, continuing a dialogue which the nurse's exit had interrupted, "how you can suggest such a thing. Even *I* should consider it — why, impossible, you know."

"There is nothing indelicate about it whatever, Glee," replied Mrs. Cushier, with slight asperity. "You must know there is not or I should not ask you. He is quite convalescent, dressed as usual, can move about his sitting-room, — everything of the kind. And here you, the daughter of his physician, of his parishioners, of his host, will not so much as

sit an hour or two with him to read aloud and see that he has what he needs! I call it simply prudish, and, I must add, Gladys, distinctly disobliging."

"I hate being disobliging, dearest," said Glee, with an affectionate and very slightly penitent little *moue*, "and it seems rather new, doesn't it, for me to be prudish?" and she could not forbear her low, mischievous laughter. "I will do anything else to help you, little mamma, but I feel my vocation at last so plainly declared! I am to be the one woman in Heathfield who neither runs after the Reverend Murray Holt, nor walks after him, nor even sits beside him. You see I really have a species of mortal antipathy to a man so run after. But I have an idea," she cried with a sudden burst of confident zeal, "let me lead the Mothers' Meeting! I would far rather, and at least I could give them points on disobedient daughters."

"Oh, Glee, how absurd!" cried her mother, impatiently. "You are just wasting time when you know what a hurry I am in."

"Then I tell you," replied Glee. "I'll go over and get Cecil. That's the very thing. She would adore to sit with Mr. Holt."

"But you don't consider it proper, I thought, for a girl to sit with him *en tête-à-tête*?" retorted her mother, quickly.

"It is just as one feels about those things," said Glee, pursing up her lips a bit and trying to fence. "I have that delicate, maidenly shrinking, don't you know? — from being left for a long afternoon with this parson-person, which makes it decidedly not the thing — *for me*! Cecil, on the other hand, would jump at the chance."

"Indeed she would," murmured Mrs. Cushier, with a mildly sarcastic smile. "She has been working for it ever since the first day Mr. Holt sat up."

"Then do, for sweet mercy's sake, mamma, let her labors be rewarded. She would make such excellent use of her time."

Mrs. Cushier nodded a vexed but emphatic assent. "Only too good," she said shortly. "I utterly object to throwing those two to-

gether in this intimate fashion. You can imagine yourself what it may lead to."

"But why in the world shouldn't you let it lead — even to the altar, if that's the place you have in mind?" queried Glee, saucily.

"Because," was her mother's incomplete answer.

"Why not let Cecil *have* Mr. Holt, mamma?" pursued Glee, without further indication. "What are you saving him up for? Not for me, I hope! Indeed *I* don't want him;" and Glee laughed again with merry *insouciance*.

"Imagine having Cecil Compton for our minister's wife!" said Mrs. Cushier, with disapproval of an evident sincerity. "I am very fond of Cecil, of course, but she is not the right sort for a minister's wife, and you know that just as well as I do, Glee. Besides, it would make any amount of trouble in the church if Mr. Holt married at all."

"Yes," replied Glee, with great gravity, "of course that is so. He would lose his immense popularity among the marriageable girls. All those he did not marry would lay it up against

him, and as he can't very well, with our Occidental restrictions, marry more than one, there would be only one on his side. Poor man! He is in a hard place."

"I understand, Glee," said her mother, with dignity, "that you are poking fun at me as well as at Mr. Holt, but it makes no difference. Facts are facts, and an unmarried man in the ministry has far more attraction than a married one."

"But haven't I heard that Mr. Holt has no idea of marrying at all? That he is married to his profession?" asked Glee, with much seriousness. "Dear man! How touching! It adds, doesn't it?" and she set her charming head on one side and looked at her mother with eyes full of mischief.

"Glee," said Mrs. Cushier, severely, "if you would sit with your pastor for an hour, if you could once even *see* the man, you would cease your ridicule. If Mr. Holt has any such ideas, which I am sure nobody ever heard him express, it is because he is so thoroughly in earnest."

“Don’t you think, mamma dear, that that makes it quite safe for Cecil? It seems to me such high ideals as his might stand two hours of Cecil’s company! And when you think of the privilege, the joy it will be to her, why then — ”

“Run along then, if you must,” said Mrs. Cushier, ill pleased, but forced to consent, since the carriage wheels already crunched the driveway gravel. “But understand, you wilful girl, that if Cecil can’t come, you will *have* to do it yourself. I can have no more argument.”

“Cecil will come, mamma!” Glee called back confidently, as she ran swiftly across the lawn and on by a long, box-bordered path which led through the Cushiers’ old-fashioned garden to the Comptons’ tennis-court.

Mrs. Cushier watched the girl’s airy figure in its light-footed progress over the sloping lawn, until it disappeared in the avenue leading to the white façade of the Compton villa. An old-English “pleached alley” following the line of that progress was a fond and favorite dream of her motherly imagination; a grassy lane,

flower-bordered, down which, it might be, little feet should dance in the years to come. That imaginary pleached alley always stood in Mrs. Cushier's mind as the symbol of her hope of keeping her only child always beside her, and of a close union of the two families long allied by neighborly kindness.

It was now three weeks since the night when Murray Holt, obedient to Doctor Cushier's invitation, had come out there to dinner with the "fever-frost" already on him, though he did not know it. The big, strong fellow had been seized at dinner with a hard chill, and almost without his knowledge or consent had been packed off to bed in the Cushiers' guest apartment. There he had lain ever since, out of kindness and pity on the part of his hosts, of necessity on his own part, since where else could he go, Heathfield having no hospital and his housekeeper also being ill?

Although sharp in access the fever had proved easily controllable by the wise doctor, and already Holt was convalescent.

Meanwhile, ten days since, Gladys Cushier

had returned from her house-party to find her father's house given over to the tiresome needs of an alien, and an alien toward whom she herself cherished a fixed prejudice. All the gayeties to which she had looked forward to celebrate her home-coming were sacrificed to "this everlasting petted and pampered parson," as she styled him privately. The house was hushed, its occupants all preoccupied with the *persona non grata*. Decidedly the daughter of the house resented it.

CHAPTER IV

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

"GLEE! What makes you in such a dashing hurry? Stop a bit."

"I can't, Larry, can't, honestly."

The girl, emerging from a side entrance of the Compton villa, was softly gliding through the broad colonnade where Laurence Compton sat smoking. He was at her side in an instant.

"What is the matter?"

He was crossing the lawn with her now.

"Matter enough. I never knew worse. Really, it is the limit."

"Hurry and tell me."

"I am doomed to sit this whole long afternoon and prattle to the only man I have ever truly hated."

"Holt?"

"Yes, he and not another."

"Where's the nurse?"

"Gone for her constitutional, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians which alter not."

"And your mother?"

"Oh, a Mothers' Meeting which she had utterly forgotten until lunch-time. She had to prepare in a great hurry. Then I ran over to get Cecil."

"And Madame Perrure is here?"

"Precisely. With five gowns to try on before five-fifteen, and there you have it."

"Hard on Cecil! I fancy she tore her hair."

"I call that brotherly tact, but to tell the truth, Larry, she did."

"Of course she did," and Compton tossed away the end of his cigar and opened the low gate in the hedge which divided the two estates. For a single moment they stood together at the gate, Glee with her curly hair blowing about, her piquant face with its merry eyes lifted to the look of gentle, well-bred concern fixed upon her. Laurence Compton's manner, like his profile, was

always admitted to be perfect, and the girl distinctly liked both. There was a vague but keen expectation in the two families that this summer would witness the culmination of the long-drawn and still indefinite relation between him and his charming neighbor.

"I wish I could help you out, little girl."

Glee flushed at the last words. What right had he to speak to her like this? and yet she half liked it that he took the right. She reminded herself that he was ten years older, and had known her all her life.

Just then, glancing past him to escape his eyes, which did not mean to let her escape, Glee caught sight of something that startled her. At an open upper window in her father's house, beyond the intervening garden, a man's face, in still, set outline, was visible.

The window was thickly framed in vines, and faded roses swung across its dark, open square, but they failed to conceal that wan, almost spectral face with its steadfast, for-

ward gaze, wholly averted from herself. The features were rugged and unbeautiful; how unlike those of the man at her side! The startling thing was that through the physical weakness so obvious upon them, there shone out in sharp contrast an inward strength of some kind,—what kind was it? Glee could not tell, only she knew that it was a look she never had seen in just that degree. A hand lay along the broad window-sill—a big, bony, bleached, man's hand. It lay so weakly, its power so inadequate to its proportions; it seemed to tell a whole story in a second of time. It was a story with a touch of pathos in it, too, which for all her light and merry mood sent a quick pang to the girl's heart and made her eyes tender. "I wonder," she was thinking, "if *that* is what he is like."

They passed through the gate.

"Well, never mind, Larry," said Glee, "I shall live through it probably. I have youth in my favor, you know," and she smiled.

Compton, whose back was toward the

house, wondered at the subtle change in her mood for all her drolling. He dimly felt that the firm, fresh force of her resistance to the situation was spent, and that somewhat suddenly. She meanwhile was receiving, as they passed down the box-bordered walk, the first faint stirring of a desire to come into the presence of the man whose face they both now saw plainly. It would, after all, be rather interesting than otherwise, she reflected, but her reflection was quickly interrupted. Compton had caught a glance and a motion of the hand from the window above, for their approach was now observed.

“Excuse me, Glee, I think Mr. Holt wants to speak with me.”

With this Compton turned rapidly into another path leading to the side of the low, rambling house, while the girl joined her mother at the front, where she was now seated in the carriage.

Before there was time to explain Compton appeared.

“Mr. Holt has chosen *me* for his compan-

ion, Glee," he said, smiling. "You see I can help you this time, after all. I put myself willingly in your place. In fact I would do more than that for you, wouldn't I, Mrs. Cushier?"

"Did he propose it?" asked both ladies at once.

"Yes, really. He says he is going to do a bit of writing presently, for which he would rather be alone than to have any one about, much as he appreciates everybody's kindness. Now for a while, perhaps an hour or so, he invites me to sit with him. Shall I go up directly?"

"How simply fine," murmured Glee, with forced enthusiasm.

"Thank you so much, Laurence. You are sure you can spare the time?" said Mrs. Cushier, politely, and so saying drove off well satisfied.

Compton disappeared up the stairs, and Glee, having her own way and her afternoon wholly to herself, was surprised to find herself not better pleased.

"It is Emerson, I believe," she said to herself, "who says that with consistency a great soul has nothing whatever to do. Possibly I am a great soul. It begins to look like it."

Before Glee had time to enter the house a boy came up the walk and handed her a long florist's box. It was addressed to Mr. Holt.

"In the absence of the nurse and mamma I suppose I ought to take care of the flowers," thought Glee, dismally remembering that every vase in the house had been filled already and sent up to the sick man's room.

Resorting to the china-closet she brought forth and filled with water a cut-glass berry-dish which she placed on the veranda table. Then sitting down beside it she opened the box, which contained exactly five dozen superb La France roses. First of all, woman-like, she fished out the card.

The card was enclosed in an envelope which was closely sealed and addressed in a lady's hand.

"Oh, yes," flouted Glee, tossing up her chin, "I know your kind, and there are as many of you as there are of your roses. If Mr. Holt were middle-aged and married how many roses would he get, I wonder? A man who likes that kind of thing—" but here her meditation was broken by the Comptons' colored coachman, who came around the house bearing an immaculate white basket of late strawberries from the green-houses.

"Shall I set them down here, Miss Cushier?" he asked with a patient smile; "they's for the Reverend Holt."

He had come on these errands exceeding often during the past three weeks.

"Yes, Peter, right there on the stand," said Glee, cheerfully. "I'll see that 'the Reverend Holt' gets them all right," and she went on with her roses, but only for a moment, for in at the open front gates a phaeton was turning, in which sat a lady in deep mourning, with a maiden, pretty and exquisitely clad, beside her.

Glee rose to receive the visitors with a hypocritical smile of welcome, knowing perfectly that they cared not a rush to see her.

They were the mother and daughter who had lain in wait for Holt after church on the Sunday before he was taken ill.

It was palpable that the visitors had expected to find their pastor visible by this time, and the pretty girl took no pains to conceal her disappointment. Her mother had brought a remarkable new brand of beef juice, which she was so anxious for Mr. Holt to try. It was so upbuilding. She hoped he would not think her too practical, but she knew there would be enough to bring him flowers, etc., etc.

At last they were off, toilettes, apologies, disappointments, and all. Glee made haste to get her last rose stem into the water, and to nestle the sealed note cunningly among the flowers, and started into the house with the bowl. But again she heard wheels. An express wagon drove in now and the driver delivered a great box from Favor's, the Broad-

way florist. Glee submissively put down her bowl, wrote Mr. Holt's name in the yellow-leaved book, and unfastened the box. Orchids this time, startling and uncanny, Glee thought them, and retreated, closing the house door after her with decision.

"I've sat at the receipt of custom long enough," she said to herself. "Clara can take care of the procession after this. No wonder she says, poor girl, that it takes one person's time to look after the things that are sent to Mr. Holt. But how I do despise women who pursue a man after this sort, and yet more, the type of man who draws to himself this particular kind of homage! He poses as a kind of clerical hero, evidently, but the kind to whom flattery is as the breath of their nostrils. He must be at heart a rampant egoist, and yet—" the glimpse of the parson's face at the window suddenly recurred to her memory. "He did not look it," she concluded.

By this time Glee had reached the upper hall, the bowl of roses in her hands, the

strawberry basket dangling from two fingers underneath the roses, the box of orchids under one arm, the can of beef juice securely tucked under the other, and the front of her dress skirt nipped between her white teeth.

The wide upper hall was dusky and dim with shade.

Not a sound broke the hushed silence. On the right a door stood half open into Mr. Holt's sitting-room. Glee stood irresolute, her skirt dropping from her teeth. Should she proceed to tap at the open door of that shrine and place before its divinity the latest consignment of his incense, retreating then with haste, demure and cold as a mere messenger? That would seem the natural thing to do. Her mother would have delivered these things as a matter of course. But she was not her mother. She had proposed to herself never to enter that room while the unwelcome guest remained. She knew that he had flowers galore, and notes galore already, likewise beef juice. Much incense had been burned in the morning hours. It

would not hurt him to wait a bit. Besides, — here Glee placed her bowl of roses and the strawberries on a table and sank into a low armchair, letting her other burdens drop by her side, — it was so deadly still. She could not enter in this strange, insistent silence.

Then as she sat and the warm summer stillness remained like a spell unbroken, Glee began to fancy something uncanny, even sinister, in its quality. There was absolutely no sound or motion on the whole upper floor of the house save the tick-tock of the tall old clock in the corner and the vibration of her own quickened breath.

How could those two men be so still? The moments passed. A strange uneasiness mastered Glee's imagination. Not so much as a syllable or a rustle came from that half-opened door. What could be passing behind it?

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE FIEND

FIVE minutes more of utter silence still found Glee sitting outside of the door of Murray Holt's room. She resolved to wait no longer but see for herself if all were well, when a deep voice of a quiet, harmonious resonance pronounced a single word, which she heard distinctly where she sat.

"Check!"

Glee sank back, covering her face with her hands, shaking with the laughter of relief from nervous tension.

Again the word was spoken: "Check."

Then there was the rattle of a swoop among the chessmen and the same voice said, laughing:—

"Mate this time, I guess."

"For sure," said Compton's voice. "You're an old hand at this game, I see, Mr. Holt."

Chairs were pushed back and there was a variety of reassuring and natural noises.

By this time Glee had become inured to her occupation of justifiable eavesdropping and had not the slightest impulse to move from her place. She was strangely weary, and glad to sit motionless.

"You're not too tired, I hope?" she heard Compton ask civilly.

"I think not. Shall we play again?"

"I don't believe you're fit."

"Well, possibly some other time would be better."

Glee was sure that the voice, which she knew must be that of Mr. Holt, flagged a little at each utterance, and she conjectured that the poor fellow was tired. But now he had begun to speak with renewed force.

"Mr. Compton," Glee heard him distinctly, listening with unblushing coolness in her place, "I have wanted a little chance to talk with you about some of the tenants in those Foundry Street blocks. They belong to the Company, I think."

"The Company has property, I believe, Mr. Holt, on Foundry Street," was the reply in a light, negligent tone.

"Pardon me if I seem intruding in other men's matters, but for the last six months a man by the name of Mullens has been running a gambling place on the second floor of that corner building, which I am sure you do not know about. It is doing a terrible work among the young men and boys in the works. It is mighty hard for the church to get hold of the young men of Heathfield while such places are running full blast." There was a slight tremor as of increased weakness in the voice.

Glee heard a little whistle; the tune was from "*Cavalleria Rusticana*"; the whistler, she perceived from the sound, was moving leisurely about the room.

"I am not interested in social reform affairs, myself, Mr. Holt. Odd, isn't it? There is such a fad in that direction nowadays. And you see I leave all matters connected with rents and leases wholly to my

good Mr. Miller. An excellent man, exceedingly capable and conscientious. You may have met him?"

In every syllable Glee recognized the inflexible, unapproachable coldness of the great mill-owner on his hard, business side, thinly disguised though it was in careless courtesy. With a woman's piercing intuition she knew that Compton's words were acting like a bodily injury to the other man in his physical prostration. She perceived, moreover, that a great hope might have met its mortal wound in that brief space.

Silence fell, but only for an instant, for there was a sudden crash, the rattling of chessmen rolling over the floor, a startled exclamation from Compton:—

"Come quick, somebody!"

Then Glee, entering with swift steps, saw in the deep bay-window behind an overturned chess-table, stretched half across a sofa's end, the big, gaunt frame of a young man with a white, unconscious face. In the middle of the room Compton stood staring helpless.

"Hang it all!" he said, startled out of his customary elegant carelessness. "Why couldn't the fellow have said he was getting played out? Oh, it's you, Glee! Good! Can't you pour something on his forehead? By Jove, I never saw a man collapse like that before!"

* * * * *

Glee's eyes ran like lightning over the serried ranks of neatly labelled bottles on a chiffonier hard by. Mechanically she had already taken in the bare hospital-like precision and emptiness of the chamber, transformed from its former and familiar luxury of decoration and furnishing. Even in that flash she noted that there was not a flower in the room! By the time that Compton had lifted Holt's trailing limbs to the sofa and disposed his head on a flat pillow, she was at his elbow, a bottle of spirits of ammonia in her hand.

She poured a few drops of the fluid into her palm and bathed the sick man's forehead, then getting frightened at the persistent rigidity of

his face, she began to tremble a bit and hastily poured a copious flood of the pungent spirits upon head and brow and temples. The fumes penetrating his nostrils, Holt stirred slightly, and weakly opened his eyes. Catching sight of the unfamiliar outline of a dark, curly head just above him he essayed a well-meant smile. But as he lifted his eyelids the generous rivulets of ammonia which were trickling down his temples and forehead found a dozen channels by which to enter his eyes, with the result that in an incalculably brief interval the man was in the clutch of a fiery torment.

Compton and Glee turned pale as they saw the convulsive action with which the poor fellow pressed both hands upon his eyeballs, his head rolling from side to side on the pillow, his limbs stiffened with the intolerable anguish.

"Oh, Larry!" groaned Glee, "what have I done? Run quick and telephone father. Can't we get the nurse? Call Clara. Fly!"

Compton fled to the telephone, while Glee stood for a moment beside the sofa, her con-

sciousness almost annihilated at the effect of her own blundering carelessness. Had she put the man's eyes out?

He was stiller now: great drops of sweat stood out on his forehead, which like his hands was seamed with heavy cords suddenly brought to the surface. Glee was satisfied that he was almost beyond consciousness again.

In a desperation which produced a sudden calmness, the girl procured a bowl of ice water from Clara, who, with white, scared face, had entered the room. Below, the telephone bell was being rung furiously.

Taking her own gossamer handkerchief Glee knelt now by the sofa, and with a hand of gentle, remorseful pity bathed the fiery eyeballs with the ice water. Presently she could see that she was bringing some small measure of relief. A long, low groan escaped the fiercely compressed lips, and then in a moment came with a certain grim humor the words:—

“Keep it up!”

As she continued the icy applications Glee,

for all her wordless misery, noted Holt's rugged, though emaciated, face and frame; the strong cheek bones, so prominent now; the hollow cheeks below; the square dogged chin; the powerful athlete's throat and chest; the muscular, clenched fists lying now across his breast, telling, more than his face, their story of what he suffered.

Little by little his sense of things was returning. Plainly, being effectually blindfolded, he took her for his nurse.

"Thank Heaven you have come," he murmured faintly.

"What—little—fiend—poured—that fire into my eyes?" he asked in another moment, with slow, difficult utterance. There was silence.

"What did he—do it—*for*?" came with a certain amazed patience.

Scalding tears were rolling down Glee's cheeks as she whispered, "He was a horrid fiend, but he is dreadfully sorry now."

"He ought to be," was the sententious response. "I am."

There was a fresh paroxysm of pain in which he pushed Glee's hands intolerantly away, and for all his will to be silent moaned in the maddening torment. Then, as if in penitence, he grasped her hands again and held them fast against his eyes, murmuring, "Such good hands—kind hands—what a comfort to get you back—you will never go away again—will you?"

"Never," lied Glee under her breath, with tearful alacrity.

"May the Lord preserve me—from the tender mercies—of that—fiend—henceforth—and—what comes next?"

"And even forever," prompted Glee, submissively.

"Amen," groaned Murray Holt.

The minutes seemed endless to them both, each with its own mastering pain to bear. But now came a most surprising question:—

"Did they like the flowers?"

Glee, speaking wholly at random, murmured, "Oh, so much! Delighted!"

“That’s good luck, anyway. I hope some more have come?”

“Oh, yes,” she replied, eager to tell the truth, for which her chances just now seemed so few. “The loveliest roses and orchids you ever saw.”

“Great! I would send them, to-morrow, to those Ship Street folks — will you?”

“Yes, indeed.”

Glee understood the flower business and a certain mysterious basket carried by the nurse on her afternoon walks better now; likewise the bare and unadorned chamber of “the pampered parson.” Fresh compunction visited her. “Oh dear,” she moaned, forgetting herself, “I shall certainly die of a guilty conscience.”

Holt now for the first time detected the fact that this was not his nurse’s voice. He tried to open his eyes, but they were gently compressed by a bandage held fast by a firm, light hand.

Glee heard her father’s step on the stairs. Her heart bounded. She sprang to her feet.

"Who in the world is this, anyway?" muttered Holt, holding fast in his iron grasp the small hand which still lay across his eyes.

"The doctor is coming," whispered Glee. "You will be all right now."

"I don't care about the doctor," was the curt reply. "Who is the nurse?"

Still silence; Glee standing holding his eyes prisoners, and he, her hand.

Then, unnerved by all that she had undergone, and seeing in spite of herself instinctively the comic side of the situation, the girl broke out into a fit of rippling, irresistible laughter.

"Who *are* you?" cried Holt, imperiously, when her brief laughter ended, as it was bound to do, in fresh tears.

Doctor Cushier was approaching the door. Compton at his side was telling him the sorry tale.

"I am, oh, I am the fiend himself!" murmured Glee, wresting her hand from his grasp.

"I believe you!" was the hearty response, and Holt threw both long arms blindly out in an involuntary, boyish movement to catch and capture his bewildering tormentor. But she had fled from the room.

CHAPTER VI

CHECK

A WEEK passed. The cause and causer of his painful accident remained enveloped in puzzling uncertainty to the Reverend Murray Holt.

Glee had met her father in the hall as she fled unseen by Holt from the sickroom, and had bound him over, as also Mr. Compton, to silence concerning her part, lot, and presence in the affair. The only explanation, therefore, given the patient was that he had fainted while alone with Mr. Compton, and that "one of the girls in the house," whom he had called in to assist him, in her fright and inexperience, had been careless in using the restoratives. Unwilling naturally to embarrass his kindly and hospitable host by further inquiries Holt had promptly dropped the matter there. He could not, however, so

promptly banish it from his mind. The double identity of that mysterious person, who seemed to be at once his mischievous destroyer and his tender nurse, ceased not to give him food for provoking conjecture. Echoes of that piteous, girlish wail, but vaguely distinguished, "I shall die of a guilty conscience!" of that mocking, inconsequent, irrepressible laughter which followed; the touch of light, firm fingers on his burning brow and eyes; the shape of a delicate wrist held hard in his own hand; the last half-smothered murmur, "I am the little fiend himself!" — all these fragments of that scene of confusion recurred persistently to his mind in the slow, summer days through which he sat with bandaged and burning eyes.

The general devotion to the sufferer had been redoubled. Mrs. Cushier and the doctor had attended upon him assiduously; Compton had offered his service for blindfold chess games with obliging and slightly remorseful good-nature, while his sister Cecil had atoned by unremitting attentions for her inability to

sit with him on the day of his accident. Her daily readings became established, and Mrs. Cushier, in her acute sympathy for the sufferer who had been so cruelly dealt with by some member of her family, she could not learn whom, waived her ingrained dislike to Cecil's close companionship with the pastor and repressed all inclination to cavil. She could not, however, quite repress a sigh when Cecil's tall, graceful figure in its perfection of spotless summer raiment swept each afternoon up the stairs to her graceful and becoming task, while Glee, cold, unresponsive, and apparently indifferent, went about her own personal avocations all unmoved.

Mrs. Cushier did not desire Glee to become seriously interested in the young clergyman; the "pleached alley," led in quite another direction, but with the instinct of maternal jealousy she did not enjoy seeing another bearing away a meed of gratitude and admiration which should naturally have fallen to her child.

As for Glee, she had become enigmatic to

her kinsfolk and acquaintances. Her father and Compton alone held the key to her condition. The radiant brightness of her face had vanished along with her gay and piquant merriment. She grew pale and languid ; an anxious little pucker had taken up its dwelling-place between her dark eyebrows ; while her eyes in their glassy weariness often seemed to speak of long night-watches. For the fact was that beneath her apparent coolness Glee was consumed with anxiety for Murray Holt and the consequences to him of her wretched blunder.

However, the days brought speedy ease from pain, and rapid healing, so that in a week, his strength now almost recovered, and only weakness of vision left apparently as trace of his accident, Holt dismissed his nurse and prepared to depart from his pleasant haven. The doctor, however, insisted upon his remaining two or three days longer, that he might keep a close watch on his eyes.

The nurse being gone, Holt, as a declaration of independence, announced that he should

come down for the first time to luncheon that day.

"At last, Glee, you will have to meet your pastor," said Mrs. Cushier, hovering over the lunch-table and adjusting certain details. "Who could have believed that that blessed man could have spent four weeks in our house and you never once have seen his face! And how many little services you might have rendered him! Look at Cecil! She has made herself absolutely indispensable to him."

"Absolutely."

Glee spoke dryly and without interest.

Luncheon was served.

Tall, angular, his gray suit hanging loosely on his shrunken limbs, his hollow cheeks half hidden by the big green shade which wholly concealed his eyes, Holt entered the room.

Mrs. Cushier hurried forward to greet him and conduct him to his place. Glee, with her cold, trembling hands clasped tight, her eyelids fluttering, moved mechanically forward.

"My daughter, Miss Cushier, Mr. Holt.

Strange, is it not, that you should never have even seen each other until now ? ”

“ A little strange perhaps,” was Holt’s reply, a tinge of coldness in his tone. The fact that to the daughter of his host his long sojourn in the house had been unwelcome had not escaped him.

Glee extended her hand. She did not speak at all. It was true in a sense that she never had seen the man himself until now. His height, his careless distinction and half-awkward but wholly unconscious dignity, his formal courtesy, the manifest traces of his much suffering came upon her as a strange and sudden revelation. Through his physical weakness, the rugged homeliness, even through the slight stiffness of his manner, she felt the manhood of the man in a degree inexplicable and even oppressive. Once before in that fleeting glimpse of his face at the window she had discerned somewhat of his spirit.

Meanwhile Murray Holt was wondering where lay the charm for which he had so often heard Miss Cushier was distinguished.

Throughout luncheon she hardly spoke, and, luncheon over, excused herself at once as she had engaged to ride with Laurence Compton, and the horses would be brought around presently.

Half an hour later Holt was reclining in a big leather chair in the Cushiers' darkened library, listening to Cecil Compton's well-modulated voice as she sat sweet and sympathetic in her exquisite lilac lawn frills, and read aloud from Henry George's "Progress and Poverty," which she privately considered arrant nonsense. Through the green Venetian blinds he idly watched the saddle-horses as they were held by Compton's groom on the gravel walk before the side entrance; Compton stood beside them. He heard Glee's light step in the hall, and the sound of an opening door. Then she appeared outside. She was no longer wan, cold, and unresponsive as he had seen her at luncheon. The little pucker had left its place between her brows, and her eyes were full of light and merriment. He saw her white teeth as she laughed saucily in answer to some

challenge of Compton's; he noticed what he had not taken in at luncheon, the spirited grace of her figure, the charming contour of her curly head. Why did this last perception give him a teasing sense of intimate previous knowledge? It was doubtless one of those baffling, sub-conscious tangled threads which lead nowhere.

He watched the mounting, oblivious for the moment to the claims and merits of single tax, and as he saw the girl erect, dainty and gleeful, sitting her horse with firm and gallant grace, responding in roguish repartee to her companion, he said to himself: "How completely it transforms that girl to be in her lover's presence! She is another being."

Cecil Compton, detecting his diverted attention, dropped her book and rose to peep through the long bars of the blind.

"Larry and Glee?" she questioned softly. "Oh, yes. Don't they look happy? That is one of those life-long attachments, Mr. Holt. They have grown up together and for each other, you know."

Holt nodded with courteous but colorless acquiescence. Plainly the affairs of Miss Cushier and Mr. Compton did not deeply interest him. Cecil took her book and read on.

Two days brought marked increase of strength to Holt, and such betterment to his eyes that he was able to go out on the veranda when the sun was not too bright, and to lay aside the awkward green shade.

Meanwhile, calls and tributes increased at a positively alarming rate. The nurse having departed, and the secret of his disposal of his floral offerings to "the submerged tenth" through her being scrupulously kept by Holt, and at least politely ignored in the Cushier family, an embarrassing congestion had ensued.

"Tuberoses have now set in!" remarked Glee, with a plaintive sigh as she slipped a large, just-delivered cluster of odorous stalks into a tall glass on the hall table, "and confectionery. And there is no outlet. We-are-having-a-sweet-time!" the last sentence in a

droll staccato, after the fashion of a college refrain she had brought back with her.

It was afternoon.

Mr. Holt was closeted with her father in his private study. Her mother was just descending the stairs, dressed to pay visits.

"Never mind, my dear," she said pensively as she reached the floor, "you will not be troubled much longer. You know Mr. Holt is going to-morrow."

"Yes, mamma," Gladys cheerfully assented.

Just then Doctor Cushier opened his door and came down the hall, addressing them both with some casual affectionate comment.

"Where is Mr. Holt?" asked his wife.

"He has gone out on the veranda, I think."

"Are his eyes doing all right, Doctor?" and his wife stopped on the doorstep. "You have been giving them a last looking over?"

"Possibly not a last," said the doctor, musingly. "I am not quite satisfied with the look of things to-day."

"Why, papa?" asked Gladys, quickly.

"It seems," said the doctor, slowly, "that

some years ago Holt had serious trouble with the right eye which has been stirred up again by this inflammation, and there possibly may be left a very slight scar on the cornea."

"What does that mean?" asked the girl.

"Well," returned her father, deliberately, "it may mean, if it cannot be removed, that he will ultimately lose the sight of one eye."

"Oh, Doctor!" cried Mrs. Cushier, in great concern. "I never dreamed of such an outcome as that, did you?"

"I never dream."

"Does Mr. Holt know it?" asked Glee, quickly.

"Oh, yes," was the almost impatient reply. "You don't have to blink things with a man like Holt."

Then after a slight pause, with a touch of tenderness and a suppressed sigh:—

"He is a *man*, Gladys." Then moving to his wife's side he said: "May I have a seat in your trap, Laura? I am going to try to reach Earle by wire to-night. Do you know

whether they are up in the Catskills or still in town?"

"In the Catskills, I think. I had a note from Marie last week dated there."

With this the doctor and his wife left the house together. Mrs. Cushier's pleasant face bore a disturbed expression, but Gladys, left standing alone midway of the hall, looked as if she were stricken to the heart.

CHAPTER VII

CONFESSOR AND PENITENT

ON the railing of the veranda, at the rear of the house, which was thickly screened with wistaria and woodbine, Murray Holt sat in a careless attitude engaged in the prosaic occupation of whittling a piece of soft pine wood.

Seeing Gladys Cushier coming toward him around the corner of the house he hastily stood and looked around at the litter he had made upon the floor with a half-apologetic smile.

"It is a terrible mess, isn't it?" he said ruefully, "but if you'll tell me where to find a broom, Miss Cushier, I'll clear it off all right. I can sweep splendidly."

"Oh, for pity's sake, Mr. Holt," cried the girl in the sharp stress of her agitation, "don't talk to me about brooms and shavings!"

"Very well," was the quiet reply, no surprise apparent at her evident excitement; "if you prefer, we will talk about the housing of the poor, always an interesting subject, or about the tariff reform —

" 'The time has come,' the walrus said,
 'To talk of many things;
Of shoes, and ships, and sealing wax,
 Of cabbages and kings,'"

he added, repeating the quotation with an oddly whimsical smile, and slipping back into his place on the railing.

"Yes, the time *has* come," murmured poor Glee in a half-smothered voice, "to talk of many things — things which should have been talked of long ago."

Struck by the sudden, wholly unusual thickness in her voice, which seemed to bring with it a pungent smell of aromatic spirits of ammonia, and a small hand pressed upon his eyes, Holt looked steadily and wonderingly at the girl.

"You have a lively habit of rapid transformation," he was thinking within himself.

For the Miss Cushier who stood before him was neither the coldly constrained daughter of the house with whom he had established simply a civil acquaintance during the past two days, nor the merry, merry maiden of whom he had had occasional glimpses as she came and went with Compton and others, her familiar friends.

The girl who stood confronting him with dark, dilated eyes had a face all white save for a burning spot on each cheek, her scarlet lips were parted and trembling, and her small hands were clasped and pressed hard against the buckle of her belt. Plainly, some extraordinary event had drawn her wholly out of herself.

"I have come to make a confession," she said now, distinctly, but with a small, dry sob under her breath.

"Oh, don't, I beg!" remarked Holt, smiling good-naturedly. The confessing type of young womanhood in its relation to its spiritual adviser was one with which he was already but too familiar, to his sorrow. "Take

any shape but that, Miss Cushier, since so many seem to be at your disposal! I don't hear confessions."

Glee looked into his wounded eyes with searching directness. They were clear and unclouded to her sight. Could she find in them any knowledge of the full variety and range of her identity? It was impossible to decide. Furthermore, their expression was simply one of good-humored amusement without the smallest suggestion of any tragic or emotional experience such as she had fancied him to be suffering at this hour.

What a twist Fate had given things! Here was she, the critical and cavilling Glee Cushier, on her knees in spirit before this fancied pampered, and posing egoist, as a tearful, over-excited, remorseful suppliant before a coldly indifferent judge! Verily she would have liked at the moment to have had it out with Fate for serving her such a trick!

And the most curious part of the situation to Glee was that she seemed never to have encountered a man so little pampered, so little

posing, so little an egoist! As he sat there on the railing, sandy-haired and freckled, with his long legs and his whittling he looked singularly like an overgrown, rather jolly, and altogether unsubjective schoolboy! And at this juncture, when he ought, according to her theory of him, to have been wholly given over to melancholy and heroics!

All the more for this her fierce penitence drove her to persist in her determination.

"You will *have* to hear mine!" she cried, her voice trembling. "It is shameful of me not to have made it before. I thought I couldn't."

"If you are bent on this unhappy exercise, Miss Cushier," said Holt, with ironical gravity, rising and crossing the veranda, "at least allow me to give you a chair," and he drew a light bamboo rocker to her side.

Apparently failing to notice either his remark or action in her strong preoccupation, the girl moved to one of the stout pillars upholding the veranda roof, and braced herself with her head tipped backward against it, her

chin lifted, her eyes gleaming with a gloomy brightness.

Holt stood a few paces from her now, leaning easily against the railing, regarding her with a half smile. She was exceedingly pretty in her high-tragedy mood. The rounded outline of her head stood out with peculiar distinctness from the background furnished by the painted pillar, and as he gazed fixedly at this outline a sudden, clear perception flashed across him. Again he seemed to inhale those aromatic fumes!

"Mr. Holt," began Glee, choking down her tears, "you never can imagine what I suffer."

"Dear, dear!" murmured Holt, compassionately, but still inclined to smile. "Is it as bad as that?"

"As that? I should think so," murmured Glee. "Mr. Holt, I —"

"Pardon me just a moment, Miss Cushier," interrupted her confessor, grown suddenly grave, "I am a bit of a clairvoyant. I think possibly if you will allow me to take your



“THE GIRL MOVED TO ONE OF THE STOUT PILLARS UPHOLDING
THE VERANDA ROOF.”

wrist in my hand a moment I can save you this — as I said before — painful exercise.”

Glee stared a little and involuntarily held up one hand.

Holt deliberately clasped the small, round wrist in his muscular hand with a vise-like grip.

“It is the same,” he said after a half minute, coolly, as if he had been making an exact and careful measurement, at the same time releasing her hand. “One could hardly mistake. Then, Miss Cushier, you are —” Here he hesitated for a word, and Glee, with low urgency of self-abasement, murmured: —

“The fiend who put your eyes out, Mr. Holt!” and she covered her face with both hands.

“This is rare!” cried Holt, upon whom the situation of a week ago was returning in bewildering force; “certainly this is rare! Do you remember my prayer for deliverance, then? my abusing some innocent person roundly, calling names, and the rest of it? Bless me, Miss Cushier, if that is all your con-

fession, I think I am the guiltier of the two. A sorry scene I made of it! Pray let me be the one to apologize. I not only called names, but took so much of your time, not to say so much of your ammonia!"

"But if you have to have that eye operated upon!" faltered Glee, by no means inclined to join in his light-minded view of the case.

"They give you cocaine, you know," he said nonchalantly. "It is a very small affair. Your father has been good enough to propose sending to New York for Doctor Earle to come out and look me over. Really, as far as I am concerned, I do not see the occasion for a specialist. But your father speaks of Doctor Earle as so connected with your family that his coming would be rather a pleasure than otherwise."

"Yes," said Glee, hurriedly, "his wife is father's second cousin. He is perfectly fine. But what — what if — oh, dear me, Mr. Holt — *what* if you should lose the sight of that eye?"

“And what — and *what* — Miss Cushier, if I should not?” returned Holt, “as is altogether probable? I have not the remotest expectation, believe me, of losing it; but if I do, fortunately I have another one, and one will see me through all right. Now can you rest satisfied? Is that the sum total of this terrible confession?” and he drew a long breath as of relief, which closely resembled a disguised whistle.

“No, it is not the whole,” said Glee, shaking her head slowly, sensibly relieved by the sturdy, matter-of-fact repose of her victim.

“All right. Let’s have the rest,” and Holt planted his feet firmly before him and crossed his arms upon his broad chest, bending his head slightly forward. His eyes were fixed upon the wall opposite, as if in resolute, enforced attention.

“I think it is my duty to own to you that I have had some little prejudices which I see now are absurd.”

Holt nodded gravely.

“I see.”

"We college girls are apt, I think, to be pretty positive in our conclusions."

"That is possible."

"I find, Mr. Holt, that in reality you do not choose to be made a hero of, to have people deluge you with roses, you know, and all that."

"It has occurred to you, then, that all this might not be precisely what I am in the ministry for, and that I might, in time, become satiated with certain attentions?" Somewhat grimly came the question.

"Yes, and that you even, in a quiet way, drive a rattling down-town trade in the tributes of your adorers. In short, Mr. Holt, I could not help finding out, you see, what you do with the flowers the girls send you!"

In one of her swift reactions to the droll side of the situation, Glee broke into a light ripple of laughter.

"Decidedly," said Holt, turning then for the first time and regarding her with judicial calmness, — "decidedly you *are* — the

‘fiend’! The identification is now complete. Proceed, please, with the confession, Miss Cushier, or we shall never get to the absolution.”

Glee stood irresolute, with eyes downcast.

“I do not know if I dare.”

“I fancy you dare almost anything. Please go on.”

“Mr. Holt, I really believe that I am a narrow, priggish person. Perhaps we are so at college when we least appreciate it. We go in there, you know, for very strenuous ideals. Well, I somehow got the notion that the church here exists chiefly for its own sake, quite apart from the real needs and problems of the people,—that it has, perhaps, a rather artificial life.”

“I fear you were not entirely wrong.”

“Also that the church likes to have a rather effective person as pastor, whom the girls and women spend their time in adoring, and that the interest of the situation is enhanced by the fact that the pastor is supposed to have committed himself to a

celibate life, or something of the kind, all of which I used to think, in my unchastened youth, you know, was a little —”

“Theatrical,” put in Holt, a slight flush tinging his cheeks; “odiously priggish that, anyway.”

“I admit that the whole situation antagonized me,” said Glee, simply.

“It must have done so.” Holt spoke with grave sarcasm. Glee’s cheeks were burning with the sense of her own audacity.

“I fear you have some ground for your judgment of the church, not here alone, but the modern church everywhere,” Holt went on more seriously, looking directly in Glee’s face now. The two established facts of her aloofness from himself, and her relation to Compton, made it possible for him to speak to this girl more freely than he could have spoken to any other.

“There is a great deal of marking time done in these days, and much of pure selfishness in the struggle for existence of the church. What can stop it if the ministry,

too, seeks its own? Nevertheless, though it may seem poor and vain, I assure you it stands for something in a man's life when he honestly concludes that one side of life, which men most crave, ought to be foregone for him."

"But surely you have not the ascetic celibate notion?" and Glee looked at him with a faint return of her old scorning rising in her eyes. Some things were so absolutely clear at the end of Senior year!

"No," said Holt, his mouth twitching with a smile at her returning confidence, "not that, either."

"I think," he said after a thoughtful pause, in which Glee felt a large and growing awe of the man, for some indefinable reason, "that you have not my point of view. Why should you have? It is really of no consequence, probably you do not care at all, and yet, since we are on the subject, let me say this—I hope I have entered the Christian ministry in dead earnest, and not to keep alive a set of old traditions. I am

pledged to work for the real needs of the people around me, not for the artificial ones. I know there is mighty little to show this, but I have not been here long, and I hope there is good hard work before me. Certain experiences, in fact, which have come to me in Heathfield, indicate, not ‘bonds and imprisonment,’ nothing heroic or striking, you know, but a mighty hard, exacting, and even disappointing life. A life apart from gayeties and garlands, although I admit the garlands have been a good deal in evidence lately. But they are none of my choosing,” he added impatiently. “The ministry to-day, as I see it, is not a pious way for a man to get his living, nor a congenial occupation for a man of scholarly tastes, but something far more difficult. It must be more, or presently it will be even less,—we shall have a subservient clergy, and in that case, God pity us! It must be the way of the Cross. It must be—at least as I see it for myself—the work of men who are willing to forego many of the joys and gains of life, and place

themselves shoulder to shoulder with the poverty and hard labor and sin and desperation of their fellows, and bear their burden with them. This is not precisely an attractive programme. A man with a wife, Miss Cushier, has no right to plan thus; therefore, a man who plans thus has no right to have a wife. That is all."

"Now I see," said Glee.

"Am I right?"

"I think you are from your point of view."

Holt took out his watch and glanced in the direction of the Compton villa.

"It is later than I thought," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "If you will excuse me, Miss Cushier, I ought to run over now and say good-by to Miss Compton and her mother. I shall be gone, you see, after to-night, for a matter of two or three weeks."

"You will take your vacation, then — after —"

"After my eyes have been taken care of. Yes." With a ceremonious salutation, which seemed instantly to render the freedom of

their long conversation a thing incredible and remote, Holt then excused himself and strode across the lawn to the little gate in the hedge.

Cecil Compton was walking slowly down her own garden path on the other side.

An hour later, upon her return home, Mrs. Cushier was met in the hall by Glee, who held an open telegram in her hand.

"Doctor Earle will be here at ten to-morrow morning," the girl announced.

"How fine that he could come at once."

"And, mamma, bear up while I tell you the rest!—the Over-soul is coming with him — 'for a little visit.'"

CHAPTER VIII

THE OVER-SOUL

THE closing chords of Beethoven's "Sonata Pathétique," played with singular power, came through the open windows of the Cushiers' drawing-room.

Gladys and Cecilia Compton, their tennis rackets in hand, their faces flushed with exercise in the hot July sun, stopped on the steps to listen.

"Who is that playing?" asked Cecil.

"Why, the Over-soul, to be sure," was Glee's laconic reply.

"Glee! What makes you call your cousin that ridiculous name?" Cecil was extremely matter-of-fact.

"You know Mrs. Earle is not my cousin, Cecil," replied Glee, coolly. "She is father's second cousin, and I call her the Over-soul

because she is so deadly sentimental. She wearies me more than any one I know."

"She plays the piano well, all the same," murmured Cecil, discontentedly. She had felt herself displaced since the arrival of Mrs. Earle upon the scene.

"She plays everything well," returned Glee. "I never saw her in better form. This new pose of the motherly matron which she is trying on Mr. Holt —"

A curtain was drawn back just then from a window and a voice of vibrating gentleness called :—

"Gladys, dearie."

Glee, with the sense of being relegated to the ranks of the young, the superfluous, the patronized, approached the window and the tall, beautiful, dark woman who stood there.

Mrs. Earle smiled upon her with unfathomable brown eyes. She wore the simplest of black gowns, but the transparent meshes of it possessed a certain classic distinction, lent by her superb figure. Gladys, in her short, white tennis suit, felt crude and commonplace.

"Don't you think that it would be well for Mr. Holt to have a glass of milk? I would get it in a minute if I could. It is eleven o'clock, you see —"

"Certainly, Cousin Marie," was Glee's short reply. "Excuse me, Cecil," she said as she entered the house and disappeared in the dining room.

Mrs. Earle turned and stood a moment, her figure silhouetted against the window. The long parlor was shaded almost to darkness. In an easy-chair, half the room's length removed, sat Murray Holt, his head resting on his hand in the languor of the mood which her music had laid upon him.

"You should not have bothered," he murmured vaguely. "I don't care for milk."

Mrs. Earle moved to where he sat and drew an Indian seat nearer. Then with a composed movement as of long practice she took his wrist in her cool, firm fingers, and so sat for a moment, her head a little averted, her eyes full of their quiet dreaming.

"You are doing beautifully," she said after

a little space. "You see I know what to expect after these little experiences."

"You seem to, indeed."

"The doctor likes to leave me with his especial patients when he can," she proceeded, "those who belong to the inner circle, you know. It is perhaps a fancy of his that I understand how to keep them from excitement and all that. A doctor's wife, Mr. Holt, ought to be something of a nurse, a little of a doctor —"

"And a good deal of a goddess," Murray Holt added to himself.

Then Glee came in, tray in hand.

"Oh, thank you, little girl," said her cousin, and smiled upon her a smile which Murray Holt felt to be divine, and which Glee resented hotly as patronizing, and so resenting, hastened from the room in rather ungracious silence.

Then Mrs. Earle, with her hands folded in her lap and her eyes full of soft compulsion, kept watch beside him until the milk was taken to the last drop, and sweetened the unwelcome draught with her gentle speech.

It was all very new and very wonderful to Murray Holt. Here at last was a woman in whose society he could linger with no slightest misgiving ; a woman who quietly announced herself as far older than he, who was the wife of a man whom he profoundly respected, and who assumed toward him this curiously captivating matronly authority, so putting him wholly at rest with himself and with her. Added to this, for all her wifely dignity and repose, Mrs. Earle was still very good to look upon, and she had the secret which only now and then a woman has learned, and never a very young one, of unconsciously flattering a man and drawing from him, as she drew from the piano, what notes soever she would.

Through the long morning hours they sat and talked. Holt told his new friend of his cherished purposes, his more personal ideals. She drew from him in general outline his stern and rugged scheme of life for himself. She professed the deepest sympathy for his theories and aims ; in fact they were strangely like her own ; but she, alas, had been thwarted

all her life by circumstance. She had never, indeed, lived her own life; perhaps now never could, and her eyes grew wistful.

Then, with swift change, Mrs. Earle gave him gentle, almost timid advice to marry as soon as possible. To be sure, it might be hard for him to find a kindred soul.

There were, however, women—only now and then one perhaps—cast in his own mould; women who could rise to his own point of view, but, and she sighed, they were not the women a man was apt to encounter in the circle of a conventional parish. Then there was a long silence. Whether it was filled up on Holt's part precisely according to Mrs. Earle's programme she could not be sure, but the reverence in his eyes when he raised them to her face gave her an acutely pleasing sensation. It had been long since she had encountered a more interesting man than Murray Holt, a more picturesque personality. She was annoyed when her cousin, Mrs. Cushier, presently hurried in with manifold apologies for her

prolonged absence — prolonged by reason of the crisis which currant jelly never failed to induce.

Doctor Earle had come to the Cushiers, bringing their cousin, his wife, with him, the week before. He had found no occasion for a serious operation upon Murray Holt's eyes, but had administered a species of treatment somewhat painful in itself which he wished Doctor Cushier to repeat twice within the week following. After this course of treatment he anticipated rapid and complete recovery, but while it lasted he preferred his patient to remain under Doctor Cushier's immediate oversight. Doctor Earle then departed, but his wife remained behind, requiring little urgency to confirm her in her opinion that this was *par excellence* the time for a visit to her dear Cushier cousins.

With admirable adroitness she quietly gathered the lines of the situation into her own hands. What, from her point of view, could be more opportune for her cousins than to

be relieved of all further immediate attendance upon their invalid guest? She was fresh and strong, she told them, and perfectly willing to make herself useful in this way. Mr. Holt seemed such a nice fellow — really a boy, don't you know? — she didn't mind in the least amusing him as well as she could, and it was *so* fortunate that he seemed to like her music!

Cecil Compton's readings became things of the past. Glee's new stirring of interest in the young minister was suddenly extinguished. Even Mrs. Cushier felt herself superfluous in her own house, so far as Mr. Holt's personal requirements were concerned. This he innocently supposed to be an immeasurable relief, and the crown of all his gratitude to his new friend was that she was lessening the burden which he so reluctantly imposed upon his hosts. He was very young, was Murray Holt, and, of woman-kind, very ignorant.

CHAPTER IX

CRESCENDO

SUNDAY again in Heathfield; mid-July now, and the rich grass and ivy and elm tree foliage around the Old North Church more luxuriant even than mid-June had found them.

Service is over, but the pastor, who has preached to his people for the first time after a month's enforced absence, is not suffered to withdraw quietly from the desk as he would gladly have done. The tide sets in, not out, and around the pulpit stairs the people gather with outstretched hands and eyes shining with welcome and with joy in his recovery and return.

With frank, unconstrained pleasure Holt receives the congratulations of the enthusiastic throng, frowning less than usual at their fervent praise of his "wonderful sermon."

But presently his eye catches the figure

of Gladys Cushier, followed by that of Mrs. Earle. They pass out, almost alone, through the church door. As far as he can tell they have not even looked his way. Why is it that after this the whole scene turns cold and colorless?

It was only the day before that Holt had left the Cushiers'. He knew that Mrs. Earle was to join her husband in New York this afternoon and return with him to her summer home. He had made his adieux to her. He had no right to expect her to speak with him again, and as for Glee—when had she ever taken a step to meet him or bestowed a thought or a feeling upon him save in that single interview on the veranda when she had confessed herself his tormentor, and a brief glimpse had been given him into her wild, eager, loyal girl-heart? Since that day she had gone her way as if her passing interest had vanished like a morning mist.

* * * * *

At the Cushiers' home a sudden blank and stillness seemed to follow the departure of

their guest that July Sunday. In the middle of the long, sunny afternoon Mrs. Cushier emerged from the seclusion of her own room in a muslin peignoir, magazine in hand, her eyes still drowsy from her Sunday siesta. She found Glee sitting in a low armchair in the upper hall bay-window.

"Somebody just went downstairs, Glee," said her mother. "I thought it was you."

"No, mamma. It was Cousin Marie."

"I almost wondered that she did not speak to Mr. Holt after church this morning. Really, he preached as if he had been inspired. A word from her, under the circumstances —"

"Would have been exceedingly commonplace, mamma. The Over-soul would not have thrown away a chance for a thoroughly effective scene *à deux*, by mingling with the common herd, can't you see?"

"But Mr. Holt will not be here again before she leaves. How can she manage an interview?"

Glee laughed merrily. "Dear little mamma,"

she murmured, "how very young you are! She is managing it now!"

Downstairs in the remote telephone closet adjoining Doctor Cushier's study Mrs. Earle was even then saying over the wire:—

"I am *so* sorry to disturb you, but you see I had a letter last night from the doctor, and there is one little point he wanted me to see you about." . . . "*Could* you?" . . . "Would it really not be too much trouble?" . . . "I leave at five, you know." . . . "Very well, then. Good-by."

Half an hour later Murray Holt was ushered into the Cushiers' drawing-room, where Mrs. Earle, statuesque and beautiful in clinging white, was waiting alone for his coming.

She conveyed her husband's message to the young man. It had been skilfully shaped into a message, the trifling suggestion which she had elicited by questions and which could as well have been intrusted to Doctor Cushier. Under her skilful touch it assumed proportions which her husband would hardly have recognized, and a quite indubitable impor-

tance. This subject covered, Mrs. Earle changed from the careful, motherly friend; she became the sensitive, impressionable woman as she held out her hand half shyly to the young man. He had risen now to go, her time being so short.

"I could not leave without one word after what you did for me this morning," she said softly.

Moved and surprised Holt looked into her face. Her eyes were downcast.

"I could not speak of it . . . before all those people. It meant too much to me. . . . If you could know how I needed just that message!"

"Indeed, I am very glad," . . . began Holt with a certain formality, touched, but a trifle embarrassed, at this wealth of emotion.

"Ah, my friend, do not let us fall back upon common-places and conventional phrases! Let us encounter each other as soul meeting soul. . . . I am, little as you perhaps have guessed it, hungry, starving for this spiritual food which you have given me."

There was a little silence which Holt did not risk breaking. He was not confident that he could carry his part in this soul-to-soul encounter. She began again, her voice faltering a little.

"Mr. Holt, there are some things one can hardly speak of. . . . I am not alone in my spiritual need. . . . There is another for whom I would give my life. . . . You will understand. He is missing the best, the highest, and I have to stand by helpless. Oh, it is so hard. . . . You have what we need, both of us. When we send for you will you come?"

The last words were spoken with almost trembling appeal, the dark eyes fixed full upon Holt's face. He had grown even graver now than she.

"I fear you completely misjudge—overestimate my power. I feel before you and Doctor Earle like a raw, untrained schoolboy. Anything possible for me to do for you, however, you may be sure I would most gladly do."

“You will come . . . if I send?”

A world of significance and of mysterious pathos accompanied the question.

“Certainly. You can count upon me.”

With these words and a reverential salutation Murray Holt hastened from the house.

As he walked back to his work in his study a flicker of doubt rose within him. Was all this emotion genuine? Had it been in perfect, highest honor to deplore her husband's spiritual deficiencies to a youngster like him? But the doubt seemed treason, and Murray Holt smothered it with one grip of his muscular, honest displeasure.

But Glee Cushier, who, coming down the stairs, had involuntarily heard the final impressive question and answer, shut her lips firmly, with a scornful light in her eyes, and to herself she said:—

“I have the Reverend Murray Holt's measure now. He is, after all, as fast for flattery as ever I thought him, only it must be administered with sufficient subtlety. And what bunglers all these other women are beside

Marie Earle! She has all her husband's scientific delicacy of touch. Mr. Holt will turn troubadour now in short order, and she can play her favorite role,—the Inaccessible Adored,—to her heart's content. The Motherly Matron was certainly effective and did its work, but it would soon grow tiresome."

* * * * *

Two weeks later, being his first vacation Sunday, Murray Holt found himself, obedient to a brief but cordial note of invitation from Doctor and Mrs. Earle, a visitor in their spacious summer cottage in the Catskills.

Not a little to the young man's surprise the good doctor, a homely, hard-worked man, many years older than his wife, had departed early Sunday morning to fill an engagement at Albany. Holt was slightly puzzled by the fact that although his host expressed suitable regret at thus missing his one day's visit, he did not suggest that the call to Albany was unexpected. On the contrary, the engagement appeared to be of long standing.

Having been led to suppose that Mrs. Earle cherished a desire unspeakably profound for the exercise of his own spiritual influence upon her husband, he found the situation a shade perplexing. Moreover, no sooner had he come into immediate contact again with Doctor Earle than the picture of him as in a condition of desperate spiritual poverty from which he, Holt, had been summoned to rescue him, smote upon his perceptions as incredibly absurd. The man impressed him as singularly wise, noble, and possessed of the straightforward simplicity which belongs to great natures. There was a certain trace of unconscious, tender wistfulness in his manner toward his wife which added yet another to the peculiar elements of a situation which Holt found less and less to his mind, for he felt himself altogether the guest of the wife rather than of the husband.

However, Sunday passed most agreeably, Mrs. Earle with fine tact leaving her guest much of the time to himself. Then the warm summer night fell over the mountain,

bringing the deep hush and mystery of its silence, and they sat together on the wide porch and watched the stars appear. Mrs. Earle quietly left her place after a time quite as a matter of course, and entering the wide hall of the house, opened her piano and began to play softly.

For a while, soothed by the music and the influences of the hour, Holt sank into a reverie from which he was aroused by the strange, new quality of the music which was now streaming as in a tangible torrent around him through the open door.

Involuntarily he rose, entered the dimly lighted hall and found a seat where he could watch the player. Mrs. Earle did not turn her head nor give any sign that she perceived his presence, but as she played the sense of a tragic, passionate conflict was so infused into the chords that the man beside her was filled with an inner trembling. He felt himself growing confused. The utter silence and remoteness and the great darkness of the world outside encompassed the lonely moun-



"HOLT WAS AROUSED BY THE STRANGE, NEW QUALITY OF THE MUSIC."

tain cabin. They wrapped themselves about the shadowy place where he sat alone with this deep-eyed woman; and in the heart of the silence and the loneliness her heart poured itself out in this throbbing, passionate flood of music.

The music died away. Holt drew a deep breath which betrayed the tension he had been under. Mrs. Earle clasped her hands, and resting them upon the upright piano laid her cheek against them and looked gently over to where he sat. Something in the attitude, in the glance, was strangely pathetic. She seemed young, girlish, almost pleading.

Still Holt did not speak.

"I never played like that before," she almost whispered after a little space. Her lips trembled slightly. Then, "One can say in music what could never be put in words."

"Very true," replied Holt, mechanically, growing vaguely uneasy.

"It is not wrong? Tell me, Mr. Holt, you do not blame me? I have lived such a strange, suppressed life. Nobody guesses the underlying tragedy."

Holt thought of the good old doctor and that patient wistfulness of his face and began to guess, himself.

"Oh, can you fancy," she cried then, impetuously, "what it must be to go through life missing the sympathy for which one's whole being cries out? Never to be comprehended in the higher, deeper things—to keep pent up through all the years these yearnings"—

"No," remarked Holt, quietly interrupting her hasty, impetuous utterance, "I really do not think I can form the slightest notion of it."

She gazed at him in unaffected surprise. He rose and took a turn up and down the hall.

In a sudden flash of perception the nature of the woman, her aims and methods, yes, the whole line of her attack from the motherly care of him at Heathfield up to this well-planned dramatic climax alone on the mountain side, seemed to lie bare before him. He was glad to turn away from her that she might not see the irrepressible scorn which compressed his lips. It hurt him to

feel it. He had so thoroughly revered Mrs. Earle, so fully believed in her. Was it then impossible for a woman to be true, straightforward, simple? Was this insatiable vanity always the regnant power to which loyalty, truth, honor even, must be sacrificed? He knew that Mrs. Earle would never break her wifely faith in the letter, but in the spirit he perceived that she broke it with every breath she drew. A groan had almost escaped his lips, but he forced it back as he turned again and faced his hostess. She had grown paler than her wont. She knew that she had missed her aim. The words which had risen to Holt's lips died away then. What was he that he should call her to account or seek to remind her of the noble realities she was losing in her sentimental craving for sensation? He was too young to do it in words, but hardly could she escape the admonition of his brief, formal excuse to bid her good night, his sudden withdrawal to his room upstairs.

In the morning he departed, as expected,

before Mrs. Earle became visible, leaving cordial greetings and thanks with her maid for the hospitality he had enjoyed.

During the weeks which followed, while yet he was absent from his parish, a letter from Mrs. Earle to Mrs. Cushier contained these sentences of plaintive suggestion and mysterious significance:—

“Be good to Murray Holt—for my sake. He is very lonely. It was a strange experience, that Sunday he was here. Poor fellow—it is not best for him to see me often, but that is a secret. Why is it given to some of us to bring trouble to those we long to help?”

Reading which interesting suggestions, Gladys Cushier was filled with young, unutterable scorning of the man who had so easily fallen into the trap which she had so plainly seen set for him; the man who held himself impressively aloof from frank, natural intercourse with simple-hearted girls, only to hover in sentimental melancholy around this middle-aged, married coquette.

Which goes to show that the Over-soul was even more subtle than Glee suspected, and that that astute young lady was for once herself played upon.

As a consequence Glee reacted sharply to her earlier attitude of critical antagonism to the Old North Church and its pastor. She regarded with scarcely concealed disdain the vain efforts of the girls in the church to charm Murray Holt into some small show of attention to themselves, and firmly decided to hold aloof from all their official activities. Nevertheless, being full of energy and purpose, she began to look about her for some altruistic line of work on which to apply the results of her long and serious training. This she found in a mission which the Old North Church had carried on for years, somewhat languidly, at the Ledge, a settlement of quarrymen and their families a few miles out of Heathfield. It was a bleak, forbidding spot and possessed an unsavory reputation. This work, consisting of a Sunday School and a week-night popular gath-

ering, was conducted chiefly by Mr. Parrish, the pastor's assistant, and a few aides. Here at least Glee could engage in Christian work and yet feel herself safe from all personal encounter with Murray Holt. His interest in the Ledge mission was mainly expressed in a very determined effort toward the revocation of the license of a saloon which was the haunt of all the worst characters of the little settlement, and the breeding-place of evil and mischief. Holt had never made a practice of regular, personal attendance at the Ledge meetings, and after Glee began to work there his visits ceased entirely.

CHAPTER X

IN AN OLD ALCOVE

MURRAY HOLT returned to his parish work in Heathfield in September in prime physical condition, but with an unlucky little twist in his mental processes. This he owed to Mrs. Earle, who had come perilously near turning him into a woman-hater. He was too manly a fellow to become cynical, too modest to overestimate his own importance to the women he met; but he could not be blind to the palpable, persistent pursuit of himself by mothers and daughters; it was no longer a mere annoyance; it had become a bugbear.

It was therefore with a sense of invincible repugnance that he found in October that the church calendar required his presence and a brief address from him at the annual meeting of the Young Ladies' Society of his church.

Crossing the lawn in the golden afternoon light sifting down through yellow leaves, Holt reflected that Daniel entering a den of lions would be an object of envy in comparison.

He set his square jaws a trifle squarer and betook himself manfully to the large, well-appointed ladies' parlor in a wing of the church. Opening the door he found the room already full of girls of all ages charmingly dressed, chattering gayly in groups. In previous years this organization had languished, and its annual meeting had been but sparsely attended; a dozen members would have been considered something of an achievement, but all this was changed for the better since the coming of the present pastor.

As Murray Holt entered the room, bright with flowers, sunshine, and motley garments in process of making, there was a perceptible flutter and sensation. Bright faces brightened; unconscious attitudes were changed; furtive touches were given to braids and ribbons, and all eyes were directed to the one central figure as he strode down the room and

took the chair which was placed for him upon a low platform.

Cecil Compton, who seemed in every word and gesture quite unconsciously to proclaim a singular fitness for church leadership, acted as president. While she was calling the meeting to order and, with astonishing punctiliousness in the matter of parliamentary law, was putting forward the business of the hour, Holt, from his place a little apart, surveyed the assembly.

He noted the graceful figures, the perfect coiffures, the clear-eyed, clear-tinted faces, the inevitable gold thimble on each pretty hand, the prevailing air of well-being and self-satisfaction. Every girl of position in the parish was there, he thought, save one. Gladys Cushier was absent, but that was a matter of course. Inconsistently enough, the young man was equally vexed with the rest for their presence and with Glee for her absence. Theoretically she was the one girl in the parish whose utter indifference to himself pleased and satisfied him. Practically, how-

ever, her aloofness had become a secret vexation to him. He knew, or thought he knew, the motives and views which influenced her in her withdrawal from all conventional church activities, and led her to throw herself with ardent devotion into the Ledge mission.

Cecil Compton, the preliminary business over, turned now to the pastor with a charming color rising in her cheeks and a pretty shyness, and signified that they were eager to listen to what he wished to say to them. Needles and needlework had of course long since been put aside, and each girl from her place gazed in mute, worshipful expectancy at the strong, rugged face and form, as Holt rose, thrust one hand into his pocket, and began to speak.

"Miss Compton, your president," he began, bowing to that young lady with characteristic abruptness, "says that you are eager to listen to what I have to say. Now I have all possible respect for Miss Compton's sincerity, but I have serious doubts as to the actual facts in this case. I have an idea that per-

haps not one person here will care to listen to what I have to say—that not one will welcome or accept it. To tell the truth, I am not deeply impressed with the effectiveness of this organization, good as I believe its purposes to be, nor quite satisfied that it is taking hold of the problem of aid to the poor at the right end.”

A slight, involuntary stir of restlessness and surprise ran through the company as they listened to these abrupt sentences. Decidedly this was a departure from the pastor's address to which they were accustomed. This was the occasion for conventional compliment and congratulation. This annual speech was wont to begin with fervent praise of their womanly devotion in the past and to proceed with confident prophecy of the great good they were destined to accomplish in the future. But perhaps this was a new method of oratorical effect. Perhaps the flattery was to come last. They waited breathlessly.

“Let us look at it a little together,” proceeded Holt, by no means ungently. “You

come here to this fragrant, beautiful room once in a week or so and have a capital visit together while you make garments for poor folk, and distribute them exactly as your mothers and grandmothers did in past generations, except that you wear better clothes than they and that in all your surroundings there is far greater luxury. Meanwhile in the industrial world, in the field of labor and poverty, all has changed, and yet the church here and nearly everywhere goes on complacently with its old outworn methods.

“I beg of you, do not be satisfied with giving clothes to poor folks, so teaching them dependence and inefficiency. Help them not to be poor folks! Help them to help themselves. This that you are doing is easy! This is kindergarten work. Who would not like to come here and have a sociable afternoon, a kind of ecclesiastical kaffee-klatsch, followed by the agreeable exercise of distributing nice warm garments to those who praise and bless your bounty? Does that call for sacrifice? Believe me, no profoundly

good results follow processes so light. Nothing in this world that is worth much comes so smoothly, with so little self-giving. It would be another thing to go down into Ship Street and Foundry Street and visit in the homes of these people; to learn their sorrows, to help them bear their burdens in true and hearty fellowship, to show them how to sew, how to cook, how to live, to help them in the care of their sick and their sinful.

“Another thing. Do you sometimes stop to consider that while you are handing out with well-meant charity these plain, serviceable garments, which to you seem adapted to ‘the poor,’ the young girls in these families, the factory girls, the girls who stand at hard labor for ten long hours of every day, look altogether past those garments, and their envious, wistful eyes scan your costly, luxurious apparel — God knows how often to their own piteous shame and undoing? I tell you the clothes you *wear* are having a hundred times the influence that the clothes you give away can have.”

Having thus ruthlessly fluttered the dove-cotes, Murray Holt, a certain sternness of mood still mastering him, passed from the church and walked down Broad Street to an old Doric, stone-pillared building, known as the Athenæum, and entered between its sombre iron gates.

The Athenæum was not a modern businesslike public library, but rather an old-time relic, sustained in all its primitive ways by the private subscriptions of Heathfield's older inhabitants, to whom it spoke of the earlier time when the town was altogether dreamy and unenterprising. The dim and dusky interior was pervaded by the odor of sheepskin and yellowing leaves. Fading portraits of forgotten worthies hung on pillars in the rotunda, with gaunt-eyed bronze busts glooming between.

Holt, who was an habitué of the place, passed through the dim rotunda and down a long corridor to a remote alcove, marked "Sociological." The light here was even duskier than in the rotunda, and not until he

had entered the deep, book-lined recess and cast his quick, practised eyes across several rows of books did he perceive that some one was in the alcove before him. On a low wooden stool in the farthest corner Gladys Cushier sat, a book open on her knee, her face lifted, full of surprise at the sudden interruption.

Holt's first impulse, feeling himself an unwelcome intruder, was to hastily withdraw with a word of apology, but the latent vexation in his mind toward this girl suddenly became acute as he saw her here, deliberately ignoring the church appointment which should have naturally claimed her presence.

An impulse of severity toward Glee in her persistent withdrawal arose in him, a part of the grimness of his mood toward womankind in general that day. Instead of taking himself off he stood, leaning against the bookshelves, hat in hand, and remarked in a cold undertone, looking down upon her:—

“I am surprised to find you here, Miss Cushier, this afternoon.”

"I come here often," returned Glee, not choosing to catch his meaning.

"You are aware that there is a meeting of your society at the church at this hour?"

"It is not my society, Mr. Holt."

"But why not? It is for all the young ladies of the church. You come within that class, do you not?" And his eyes searched her face steadily.

"I have been away so long." Glee hesitated a little. "I do not think I am fitted for the kind of work the girls are doing in the society. I hate to sew."

"Not more than you hate all other forms of church work, I think," said Holt, quietly.

Glee's eyes fell, and an unwonted timidity kept her silent.

"It is very easy, Miss Cushier," Holt went on, "to see the imperfections in all our familiar methods of working. Possibly you have not realized yet how very hard a thing it is to do even a little good. To me it seems better to try and fail than not to try at all."

"But I do try," protested Glee, her color

rising, her eyes darkening; "I do try to do a little work out at the Ledge Mission."

"Certainly you do. I know that perfectly, and approve of it, so far as it goes. That appeals to you as something original and spontaneous; not hackneyed, conventional, commonplace. Therefore you are willing to throw yourself into it, not considering how quickly all our efforts stiffen into routine, no matter with what fresh impulse they may be begun."

"I do not think my work out there is wholly a matter of taste," said Glee, rebelliously.

"It is more so than you think," was the reply. "I am on the warpath as a denunciatory prophet this afternoon, and having made all the other young ladies wretched, I am inclined not to spare you, for really, I think you deserve more than the rest."

"You think then that I fancy myself superior to the other girls because I do not work with them?"

Holt assented.

"What an egotist I must be!" exclaimed Glee, hotly.

"Unconsciously so," was the quiet answer.

Glee looked up, and squarely meeting his eyes found in them no relenting as they met the defiance of her own.

"Miss Cushier," Holt resumed coldly, "you utterly repudiate my right to make these or any other strictures upon your line of action?"

Glee nodded slightly.

"Nevertheless, I believe I am within my province."

Glee turned meditative for a moment. To be sure, he was her pastor. Then looking up with a faint shadow of her brilliant smile she said:—

"Very well. What would you have me do? Not that I fancy I shall do it."

"I think you will," said Holt, gravely. "I think what I may say to you will appeal to you as worth consideration. I am in no mood to flatter you or anybody. I rather think you know that is not my habit. But I will say frankly that you seem to me to have a

nature generous, ardent, and effective, which, however, you permit to be ruled to a great extent by impulse. You call all things as they exist into question, being confident of your ability to produce new and better methods."

"Oh, Mr. Holt, I am not so vain as that!" exclaimed the girl.

"Listen, please. I can see plainly that your position is a somewhat difficult one. You have the misfortune not to like your pastor, which is not at all your fault. I cannot see why you should. But this naturally increases your unsympathetic attitude toward the church and its workings. Now, what if you were to try to relegate that factor to the background of your consciousness,—to eliminate it from your problem of life and action?"

Holt asked the question with impartial gravity.

"I might try," murmured Glee, with a touch of mischievousness, adding to herself, "If only it were not for the Over-soul!"

“What if you were to consider that you are still somewhat young, a trifle inexperienced, and that there may still be something to be said for the forms and channels of Christian work which others have tested and found, however imperfect, of some small value? What if you were willing to infuse the genius, the radiance of a quite exceptional personality into things as they are, and thus perhaps impart to them the fulness of life which it has pleased God to impart to you?”

These words were spoken with the same severe, impersonal neutrality which had belonged to all that Holt had said. They could not be turned aside as compliment. Glee's intuition saved her from such a blunder.

“Miss Cushier,” Holt continued with deeper gravity, “I admit that this began rather absurdly on my part, but seriously, the time in which we are living is so great and so critical, the Christian Church is being so hard tested to show whether it can bring its motive power to bear upon the actual

conditions of modern life, that earnest persons cannot be allowed to work at cross-purposes. God's work is too stern, too vital, for small misunderstandings to find place in it. The odds are awfully against us, I sometimes fear, at best."

There was a long silence, in which Glee mused deeply, and during which the coldness and grimness of Holt's temper underwent a thawing process, for when he spoke again it was to say with an odd, little smile:—

"You see I have been trying to think how to make a good girl of you, if I can."

"It seems so strange—I know I have been disagreeable, but I did not suppose you ever bothered about me at all."

"Only when I cannot help myself; be sure of that."

"Then I have really been a knotty problem?" she murmured, with a falling cadence.

"One of the knottiest!" said Holt, and laughed a little.

He turned then with his habitual abrupt-

ness, and began to scan the rows of books in search of the volume he had come for. Glee, the while, sat still in her corner gravely regarding him, never dreaming that no look of hers was lost upon him. In reality, beneath his mask of cold, detached indifference, Murray Holt was at the moment thrillingly conscious of her personality, in all its subtle and contradictory charm. The girl's head resting against the red and yellow leather of "Penal Institutions," with the round chin lifted, the scarlet lip caught by the white teeth in a kind of lingering defiance, the eyes sweet with humility, deep and pathetic with new perception, struck him as more wholly lovely than anything he had known. Her sincerity and simplicity contrasted strongly with the self-consciousness, the artificiality of the girls with whom he was most familiar. Her occasional rebellious haughtiness seemed to him to give an inimitable accent to her nature and to make her the more irresistibly captivating. She would give a man plenty to do, and none

too much ease, but she was real, and her reality shone out now with the softly dazzling radiance of womanhood at its gentlest and best. But Glee was farthest from guessing that it was with thoughts of herself that Murray Holt was absorbed.

Plainly, she thought, he was through with her now. His whole attention was given to his search for some needed passage through book after book. At length he appeared to find what he sought. Holding the book open he fumbled through his pockets for a piece of paper on which to make notes, his pencil between his teeth. Glee saw him take from a handful of letters a thick, creamy, square envelope. She instantly recognized the handwriting of the address as that of Marie Earle, and in the same instant perceived that the seal was unbroken, the envelope unopened. In amazement she reflected that the Over-soul had been in Italy now for six weeks. This letter which Holt seemed to find peculiarly adapted by reason of its broad, white surface, to his purpose of mak-

ing notes, bore an American, not a foreign, stamp and postmark. It must, therefore, be at least six weeks old; even now it was unopened!

As he carelessly turned the envelope over and laid it on the open page of his book, Holt glanced at Glee and commented casually:—

“Some time I expect to catch up with my mail, Miss Cushier. My pockets are always full of letters which I have forgotten to read. But they will keep.”

Glee opened her eyes.

Five minutes later Holt left the alcove marked “Sociological,” not having spoken again.

CHAPTER XI

A STUDY IN ECONOMICS

AT ten o'clock of a morning some days later Gladys Cushier appeared on her veranda, her hands full of papers. Her air was alert and businesslike, the manner of one who has no time to spare.

"Now I should like to see my neighbor," she was thinking, "and lo and behold," as she glanced between the thinned branches of the wistaria vine "he is on his way! How obliging of you, Mr. Compton," she remarked aloud as that gentleman now appeared at the foot of the steps.

"Obliging?"

"Yes, I was just wishing to see you."

"Would that happened oftener!"

"Nonsense, Larry, don't take that tone."

"Very well. What a charming gown then! Is that Miss Frere's latest achievement?"

"Yes; do you like it?"

"Words are cold."

The dress of dull blue cloth fitted the delicate shape of the girl exquisitely, and set off the sparkling radiance of her face and the masses of dark hair. In her present mood and guise Compton found a peculiar charm. Besides, the summer was long since ended. It was time to be in earnest. She had been provokingly elusive and wilfully unapproachable this summer.

"Glee," Compton spoke with a sudden obscure impulse, whose source he could hardly have traced, "I want you to promise me not to go down to that odious Ledge meeting to-night. Honestly, it is no place for girls like you with all those ruffians. I have forbidden Cecil's going with you."

There was a slight, almost imperceptible, tilt of defiance in Glee's daintily poised head.

"Cecil is a dear, obedient girl," she said demurely.

"And you are a dear, disobedient one," he cried, taking her little hands in his and looking into her face.

He was handsome, well-groomed ; his manner, although affectionate, was perfectly correct, but Glee's liveliest impression at the moment was that she wondered she had never noticed before how much he looked like a well-fed and prosperous spider.

"Larry, please let go. You will make me drop these things." And Glee not gently withdrew her hands, glancing as she did so at the papers in them.

"But suppose you let the things go, you wilful child, for once. I have been waiting a good while —"

"But, Larry," cried the girl, urgently, "I have at least fifty questions to ask you, and I am in such a hurry. You see I have only a few days more for my paper for our College Women's Club in New York. We meet next Monday. My subject is 'Industrial Conditions in the Average Factory Town.' You can help me a lot on that, can't you?" she hurried on.

"You have fifty questions, Glee, and I have only one," began Compton, significantly.

“‘The night has a thousand eyes
And the day but one!’”

sang Glee with an air of exaggerated sentiment which effectually scattered any approach toward seriousness.

Compton bit his lip. Once more she had evaded his one question. What did it signify? He was sure her attitude had been very different at the beginning of the summer. Some mysterious, antagonistic influence had interposed between them. It had never been clearly defined in their familiar, friendly intercourse, and yet it was now always subtly present. A dull color spread slowly over his face and a smothered anger rose within him as he turned with a slight shrug and drew up chairs for them both. The October day was warm as summer.

Let it go for now, but his time would come, for Mr. Laurence Compton distinctly purposed in his heart to marry his piquant and pretty neighbor, and he was not a man to be easily turned aside in his purpose.

“Very well, Glee. What is it you wish to

ask me about? You know I am always at your service."

Glee busily consulted the printed and pencilled notes which lay in her lap.

"Well, to begin with. Here is my first fact; I have put down already that your factory makes fire-arms and guns, and that you employ about twelve hundred men and women."

Compton nodded, conscious of an invincible distaste for the unexpected and unwelcome task before him.

"The first point upon which I need enlightenment is this," began Glee again. "Has any plan of profit sharing ever been employed in your factory?"

"Never. We do not run to fads and fancies."

"How many hours per day do the operatives work? These are our old questions in economics, Larry — you don't mind if I go right through the catechism?"

"Ten in most cases. Certainly not."

"Beginning at what hour?"

"Seven."

"How many receive less than five dollars and less than six per week?"

"Oh, I couldn't say. I guess the girls do not usually get more than five, and the unskilled laborers more than six. But some of the men get high wages, you know, up to two dollars a day and more, the real mechanics."

"Does the factory furnish steady employment the year round?"

"No. Our people are mostly 'laid off' in the summer. We have to shut down from three to four months, you know."

"What do the employees live on when 'laid off'?"

"Blessed if I know! That is their lookout. On their savings, I suppose."

"Out of five or six dollars a week," mused Glee; "oh, of course," she added soberly.

Compton glanced sharply in her face, as it bent industriously over her work, but there was no suggestion of sarcasm there. For his part he was getting a trifle nettled as the questioning went on. What business

had those college people setting girls up to meddle with what was of absolutely no interest or concern to them? He had never believed less in higher education for women!

“*Is there opportunity for promotion?*”

Glee cocked her head in a charmingly birdlike pose, and asked the question with a cunning mockery of impressive importance.

“Much you care!” laughed Compton, mollified by her pretty airs. “Why yes, of course, my child, there is chance for promotion on some lines, where there is a field for skill. A man, however, whose business it is to merely shovel coal or drive the truck-horses is not likely to do anything else.”

“As long as he lives,” added Glee, musingly, “there is no scope for a display of talent there. Decidedly they all ought to have trades, Mr. Compton,” with a pretty pretence of experience and wisdom.

“That’s right. Still, you know, we must have some unskilled labor.”

"Can the girls ever get more than five dollars a week, then?"

"Possibly, the quickest of them."

"Do they ever get less?"

"Oh, yes, five dollars is good wages for a girl."

"What is the minimum?"

"Two and a half, perhaps. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Not in the least. Two dollars and a half,—and out of that they have to pay their board—"

"Really, Glee, you are beyond me, now. I am not conversant with the private life of the factory girls. There are plenty of them glad to get that, I can assure you," and Compton's irritation was visible through his chilly hauteur.

"Pardon me, Larry. Of course that is so. Then are there—let me see, where was I?—yes, here it is, are there, for any causes, deductions made in the wages?"

"Certainly."

"For what?"

"Absence, for one thing."

"For every cause? — sickness, for instance?"

"Why, naturally. We should have them all sick, my dear, if we supported them in sickness. Of course, in peculiar cases, the Company does the proper thing."

"But that is not business."

"No, simply a gratuity, as in the case you may remember of those men killed last June in that explosion. The Company bore all the funeral expenses," he added with a slight accession of complacency.

"How fine," said Glee, her enthusiasm, however, chilled by a sudden question as to what would be done by the families after the funerals of their bread-winners. She proceeded with her questions, which were for the greater part on printed class papers.

"Are deductions made from wages on legal holidays?"

"Certainly. The men are not paid when they do not work. That would be unjust."

Glee gave an odd little gasp and her color deepened.

"How in the case of the machinery breaking down, of enforced idleness?"

"The men have to stand it, of course."

"You mean that when they are on hand, ready to work, but cannot work because the machinery is out of order, their wages are then deducted?" she asked, looking with an ominous light in her eyes straight in Compton's face.

"That's right. That's business, Glee. That is the universal practice, you will find."

"That makes it all right, doesn't it?" she murmured under her breath.

"Now come a lot of questions," she began after a brief pause, "about the healthfulness and safety of the occupation. I suppose in this case it is somewhat dangerous, necessarily."

"Yes. That is unavoidable. We regret that side of it, but fire-arms have to be made."

"Naturally, else how could the Boers have

been subjugated, and the Filipinos benevolently assimilated ? ”

Again Compton glanced with an irritated misgiving at Glee's face, but again he found it wholly innocent of satire.

“The next point I have to cover,” she proceeded, “is about the houses occupied by the factory people. Are they owned by the Company ? ”

“Not in all cases by any means.”

“You do not own those rows on Ship Street ? ”

“No. Those are Binney's.”

“But you do own these tall tenements on Foundry Street ? ”

“Yes.”

“All of them ? ”

“I think so.”

“Are these dwellings in good sanitary condition ? ”

“I really could not say as to that,” replied Compton, his secret annoyance disguised in a tone of airy negligence. “I don't meddle with that part of the business. It is all in

Miller's hands." ("The regular formula," thought Glee.) "You would have to ask him. But they must be all right. They are always rented."

"I see. They don't have typhoid or diphtheria or any of those zymotic diseases, then?" punctiliously referring to her paper.

"Not that I know of," answered Compton, hardily. He was growing excessively tired of this exercise. "As I told you before, Glee, you will have to ask Miller about all those things."

"Yes," said Glee to herself, "and hear exactly the answers he is trained to give. Thank you, I'll not trouble," she said aloud.

"Is the catechism nearly over?" he inquired with forced patience.

Recognizing intuitively that further answers from Compton would be destitute of value or veracity, Glee folded up her papers with an air of finality, and said:—

"Quite over. I am sorry it has been so tedious."

Compton rose.

"Not tedious in the least for me, my dear girl; it is always a pleasure to serve you — that you know," and he valiantly essayed a playfully tender smile, but his inward, smouldering heat and chagrin seemed to cloud his eyes as with a smoky veil.

"You must learn, Glee, my dear," — he had reached the step now, — "that a factory is not precisely a benevolent institution, an Old Ladies' Home, nor even a Hospital for Incurables. It is a business enterprise."

"So I see," responded the girl, lightly; "you are not your brother's keeper."

"Certainly I am not," assented Compton, quickly, not recognizing the Biblical allusion. Glee's lips twitched.

"Business," he added quite seriously, standing hat in hand, loath for some reason to drop the subject and let it lie in its ugly nakedness just where it had fallen between them, "business, Glee, is a warfare, a hand-to-hand, never-ceasing fight, for most of us."

"A fight for what?" asked the girl, quickly. "To make money? to get rich,

to keep rich ? ” Plainly her sympathy was not acutely enlisted by this impressive statement.

“ No, that is only incidental. It is a fight to beat, — not to be beaten in the game. Good morning,” and with a courteous inclination he turned away and passed down through the garden walk.

Glee had risen and stood for a few moments in silent abstraction, watching his departing figure. Slowly, imperceptibly until that moment to her thought, the contrast between these two men, Holt and Compton, had assumed fixed shape. The one with his stern and passionate devotion to his fellow-men, seeking to conciliate no one, the other with his impervious selfishness, his cynical indifference to the sin and suffering of the world at large, thinly cloaked in his indulgent personal generosity toward herself. How had she ever for a moment fancied that Compton could become something near and dear to her ? To-day his familiarity, his half-caressing attitude toward her stung her as insolent and insufferable.

In the innermost depth of his consciousness Compton knew as he bade Glee good morning that in her present mood she was ready to dismiss him not only for the moment, but, as a lover, for all time to come.

"It's all that confounded parson," he thought in uncontrollable bitterness as he went away, for although she might be unconscious of any preference for him, he was convinced that from Holt Glee had caught the animus for this paper she had undertaken to write. An irreconcilable disparity between her point of view and his own had silently asserted itself during the last hour. He knew it perfectly.

The suspicion that in her half-mischievous warding off of his attempt at a declaration and in the whole ensuing interview Glee had intentionally put an end to his further advances, filled him with a rage of jealousy. And the jealousy, under the lash of which he suffered, was double, for it was for Cecil as well as for himself. His sister's some-

what obvious preference for Holt had been long, albeit tacitly, taken for granted in the family. Thus her secret hopes as well as his own seemed to him threatened.

After a half-hour's abstracted pacing of his private room this much was clear to Compton: Holt must leave the field clear to him in so far as Glee was concerned; must give up all his democratic and social reform nonsense, marry Cecil, and settle into the appropriate groove for the pastor of an aristocratic church, or he must leave Heathfield, and that in short order.

CHAPTER XII

THE CANDID FRIEND

AT three o'clock that afternoon Mr. Laurence Compton alighted from his shining trap before the manse of the Old North Church. Inwardly he was still breathing out threatenings and slaughter, but to all appearance he was his perfectly bred, composed, and well-regulated self.

Mrs. Fisher, the housekeeper, told him that Mr. Holt was not at home.

"This is one of his days in his down-town office. He left about ten o'clock. He has taken a couple of rooms down in Ship Street, you know, Mr. Compton, and works there forenoons."

Yes, Compton was aware of the fact, and his gloomy brow indicated that he regarded it with little less than disgust.

"Besides," continued Mrs. Fisher, "Mr. Holt is all taken up now with this excise-board business, trying to get the license taken away from that scandalous Sunflower Tavern out at the Ledge. So he doesn't stay in his study anyhow very regular."

"I see," replied Compton, shortly. "What is the outcome? Do you know?"

"Oh, yes, sir. The case came up just yesterday, and Mr. Holt, he appeared against Lorish, the man who keeps the Sunflower, and it was a great victory. The license was revoked. I suppose they will be raging now against him, though. I declare I am afraid for that man, Mr. Compton, but he don't know what fear is for himself."

Compton gave a non-committal, inarticulate response.

"But, come in, sir, won't you please?" Mrs. Fisher went on affably, desirous of detaining the distinguished caller. "Mr. Holt will most likely run in for a bit about this time to get his mail."

Having seen the visitor help himself to an

easy-chair in the study the cheerful house-keeper withdrew.

Compton looked about him at the sober but rather stately room, lined with books, full of the atmosphere of brain work, and destitute of all superfluous decoration or pretty bric-à-brac.

An enormous desk stood in the middle of the room with massive, mannish equipment. Across the morocco-bound blue blotter lay a sheaf of magnificent yellow chrysanthemums. The sunlight, pouring in at the windows, seemed to concentrate its rays upon the great blossoms and fill their petals with lambent light.

Compton felt his gaze drawn repeatedly to the brilliant suffusion of color made by the flowers, and presently was aware that he recognized in them the product of his own greenhouses. He rose and walked over to the desk. They were his gardener's famous latest product, the "St. Cecilia."

"Cecil's work," he thought, frowning with distaste. "I wish she could let this fellow

alone. She fairly throws herself at his head."

At the end of the long, leafy stalks of the chrysanthemums lay an envelope, its seal apparently hastily broken, and beside it an open note. With a careless glance Compton's eyes ran over the lines which were in his sister's handwriting.

Cecil wrote to say that she could not help Miss Cushier in the singing at the Ledge that night as she had promised, as her brother would not permit her going. She was so very sorry to disappoint him. Would it be a disappointment? She dared not say how great a one it was to her. She sent the flowers to convince him that she had taken all that he said at the Society meeting most humbly as for herself. She longed to attain to his high ideals, to be noble and self-sacrificing. She believed that he could teach her, etc., etc.

Compton returned to his easy-chair with an expression of pungent disgust.

"Are all girls such fools as that?" he

muttered. "I don't believe Holt is dense enough not to see through this stuff and nonsense. After such an outpour as that I may as well show my hand."

At that moment the door opened, Murray Holt entered, and hastened to cross the room and welcome his visitor.

"I ran in to tell you that my sister and Miss Cushier will not be able to attend your meeting to-night at the Ledge," said Mr. Compton, after they had exchanged civilities. "You will have to depend on others for your singing."

"Very well. It was friendly of you to take the trouble."

Murray Holt did not say that Cecil had written him to somewhat the same effect. He instinctively avoided mentioning her note.

Compton now returned to an easy position in his chair, and with a smile of winning frankness said, "I believe I have shown myself your friend, Holt, my dear fellow, since you came to Heathfield."

"Assuredly," said Holt, cordially, seating himself.

"I hope our relation is such that even if I should be forced for once to present myself in that ever unwelcome rôle of the candid friend, you would not pray to be delivered from me."

"I think you are safe, Mr. Compton. Try it and see," said Murray Holt, bracing himself unconsciously as he sat.

"Well, you are a busy man, and I see I must make short work of what I have to say. To dash straight into the heart of the thing, allow me to say that you are getting just a little on the wrong line lately, in your work here in Heathfield. That is, in my judgment."

Holt faced his visitor steadily. "Go on," he said pleasantly; "I am interested."

"Sympathy with the working classes is all very well, Mr. Holt, in its place. I believe it is unnecessary for me to say that I am in favor of a liberal and philanthropic attitude toward them. But the Old North Church

never was, and never will be, a church of mechanics."

"The Founder of the church was a mechanic, however."

Compton waved his hand impatiently.

"Those allusions are doubtless effective, Mr. Holt, from the oratorical point of view, but they have no practical bearing."

Holt bent his head as if in assent.

"What some of us feel, is that you are trying in one way and another — I will not go into particulars — to turn this church into a kind of mission, to bring the lower classes to the fore beyond what has ever been done here. Now such a course will very soon alienate the substantial people in the church, especially as the impression is given in various ways that you have imbibed a lot of eccentric notions. For instance, how did you ever come to mix yourself in this excise business, that beastly tavern affair out at the Ledge? Leave that to ward politicians, Mr. Holt. It is no business for gentlemen."

Plainly Compton was warming to his theme.

"There is another question you will pardon me for asking. What in thunder do you have an office down in that wretched alley for?"

"For the reason that many of my parishioners live there," answered Holt, quietly. "Having spent nearly a year in the neighborhood of my aristocratic members exclusively, it has seemed only reasonable to me to spend a few hours now and then among these others."

"Certainly it is a thousand pities," murmured Compton, "that you should make these blunders now, for if ever I saw a man have a fair start and a fair field you had them for the first six months after you came here."

"I hope I have them still," said Holt, whose face had grown sterner during the last few minutes.

"But, honestly, you are weakening your influence with the men who are your best supporters. I will not say that it is too late yet to retrieve any ground you may have lost. Everything is yours yet to make or lose. Our parish offers you a simply ideal settlement

for ten years to come, and even longer for that matter, unless you are ambitious for a metropolitan pulpit. Your income would always be made adequate to your needs, for you have an extraordinary hold upon the admiration and love of our people. Many pleasures and advantages, such as travel, yachting, perhaps, in foreign seas, visits to Egypt, Greece, and all that kind of thing would come your way. You would, of course, have time for all the literary work on congenial lines to which your tastes may call you. What more can a man desire in your profession? You must marry, of course, in time, and the sooner, for some reasons, the better. It cannot be denied that when you propose marriage it will make some stir and friction, possibly even a crisis, in the church. If you made an unfortunate choice, you might have to leave your field, as many a man has done."

Holt merely nodded.

"On the other hand," pursued Compton, "it is conceivable that if you made the right choice your marriage might immensely

strengthen your hold here, might give your pastorate a permanence otherwise impossible. I can imagine this being the case."

"You are very good to have given your attention to the matter," said Holt, quietly.

"Well, to tell the truth, my dear fellow," and Compton assumed a peculiarly confidential tone, "I have sometimes feared that you underrate your own claims and possibilities. You must not be too distrustful of yourself. Intellect and personal power — manhood, in short — will win out anywhere and carry the day with a girl of the right sort, without money. Of course such a girl as I speak of would not marry you as a minister, don't you understand? The day is past when a minister's wife is in any sense a functionary, and I don't see why a girl need hesitate, if she is assured on her own part of a comfortable income. A girl with money can afford to marry a man without, you see. Of course this is very delicate ground, and the less said explicitly the better, but perhaps you understand me?"

The significance of this extraordinary speech it was indeed impossible to misunderstand. The fatuous weakness of Cecil Compton's note came unbidden to Holt's mind, and his color rose despite himself. He made a vaguely confused response, and for a moment an embarrassed silence fell, in which Compton's sense that if he had not made a complete success he had made an irreparable failure mounted large in his brain.

"And what," asked Murray Holt at last with marked gentleness, "what if I cannot see it just as you do, Mr. Compton? What if my own ideal of my work in the ministry should fall clear outside of this very attractive ideal you have just sketched for me? Men do not always see things alike, you know, no matter how much they would like to."

Compton's face darkened and his eyelids flickered.

"You mean to ask," he rejoined curtly, "what will follow if you choose to disregard advice and go on in these fantastic lines that you have chosen?"

“Yes.”

“I foresee in that case,” returned Compton, slowly, as if weighing each word, “that you will find a door out of Heathfield wide open to you in a very brief period of time.”

Holt made no reply.

“I suppose you may be aware,” Compton went on significantly, “that Mr. Binney and one or two other men in the church take care of half your salary, Mr. Holt?”

“I have understood so.”

“I may say that Mr. Binney, with whom, by the way, I am to dine this evening, has a certain regard, which you would perhaps find it difficult to share, for my judgment and opinion.” And Compton glanced keenly into Holt’s face as he made this suggestion.

“That I can perfectly understand.”

“You will perhaps gather from what I have already said what that judgment and opinion would be.”

“It would not be difficult to do so.”

Holt had risen and walked slowly the length of the room. Turning on his heel

he faced Compton at a short distance, and looking him straight in the face, said steadily : —

“Mr. Compton, you were kind enough when you first came in to say to me plainly that I was on the wrong line. I find myself now obliged to use your own words. *You* are also in this instance, altogether on the wrong line.”

Compton looked at the young minister in turbid silence.

“No man,” Holt continued without raising his voice from its even monotone, “nor any group of men, owns my conscience nor can control my actions. If I were to change my line of work, it would not be in a way to save myself or my salary. I have an idea that I can make a living in one way or another, and I have not entered the ministry with the expectation of making more than that. I must continue to regard myself as equally the pastor of my poor and of my well-to-do parishioners, and to fight the devil where I find him doing his worst work.”

"Mr. Holt," said Compton, unable to master the nervous tremor which suppressed anger produced in him, "you amuse me. You are so very — young."

"That is fortunate in a way," said Holt, gravely, "for it means that I can afford to make a few blunders."

"Exactly," returned Compton, sarcastically; "thus far no one but yourself suffers. We will at least hope that you would not allow any other person to share in the singular and it is to be feared, checkered career, which you seem to have laid out for yourself."

He had risen now and moved toward the door. As he said these words he glanced sharply into Holt's face, and so doing, perceived a swift, indescribable change in it, as if a sudden light had been chased over it by a sudden and painful shadow. Instantly the suspicion which had lain smouldering in his mind since the morning flared into conviction. It was as if both men at that moment saw one clear, radiant face, one haughty and fearless little head in the

space between them. Holt, who had grown paler again, folded his arms across his breast and stood motionless.

“Yes, Mr. Holt,” Compton added with a certain punctilious distinctness, “you men of heroic mould have to forego certain of the joys which fall to us common mortals, else,” and he shrugged his shoulders, “else you would seem to be not only something less than heroes, but a little less even than we common and inferior beings. Pardon if I have detained you. I should be on my own way, I see, to the Directors’ meeting. Good afternoon.”

Holt stood silent where Compton had left him, for the echo of words of his own in a leaf-shaded veranda on a certain July afternoon, rang importunately in his ears.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE LEDGE

A SMALL, rudely furnished hall over a country store; bare boards for the floor; bare benches for the people; rough plank for the walls; rough rafters for the ceiling; a deal table on a platform, holding a kerosene lamp and some books; fifty people, hard-handed, hard-faced men from the quarry, and their wives and children already seated; a noisy, heavy-footed band of boys hanging around the door — such was the scene of the Ledge meeting at half-past seven on that same evening.

Thus far no one but Murray Holt had appeared from Heathfield. He had come in place of his assistant, Mr. Parrish, for especial reasons. Although the failure of those who had heretofore sustained the musical features of the programme would strip the

evening of much of its attraction, Holt was glad at heart to find it thus. He had felt, the moment he had come into the little settlement ten minutes earlier, that the trouble which he had foreseen for to-night was brewing. Sullen looks met him in place of pleasant greetings, and from the swinging doors of the Sunflower Tavern shouts of derisive challenge and muttered threats had been flung across the street as he turned in at the entrance of the hall. Upstairs, in the hall itself, he felt a perceptible atmosphere of strain and expectancy. Every one seemed full of suppressed excitement, half curiosity, half anxiety, and the whispering was incessant as the people took their places and filled up the benches.

He was glad to meet alone whatever was to be met to-night. At that moment, however, the rough group at the door parted and Gladys Cushier herself stepped alone into the hall.

With a leap of the heart, half of irresistible joy at sight of her, half of instinctive

dread for her, Holt met and drew her aside. A certain rapport had arisen between them since their talk in the Athenæum, a species of armed truce.

"I was sure you were not coming to-night," he said very low.

"Why were you sure?"

"Mr. Compton told me that neither you nor his sister would be here."

"Mr. Compton could speak for his sister, but he had no right to speak for me."

Glee was far from guessing the world of significance which those careless words held to Murray Holt. She was not pledged to Compton, then!

"However, I wish you had not come," he said soberly. "If it is not too late, I prefer that you should return at once. Is your coachman here still?"

"No, he went directly back. He will come for me at half-past eight, as he has before."

"Very well. It will not matter. I merely thought we might have a rather disagreeable time to-night, possibly. Some of the people

are stirred up a bit about the action of the excise board in revoking the license."

"I felt when I came in that something unusual had happened," said Glee; "but I had no idea of such a victory yet. But I noticed that those fellows who are always lounging about the tavern steps stared at me in an odd sort of way."

"The Lorish contingent will not be in a very amiable mood, I imagine," said Holt, thoughtfully, devoutly wishing Glee safe at home. "We'll get along all right, though," he added confidently as he led her down the room to the small melodeon at the right of the platform. Each was steadied by the composure of the other, and a swift, silent fellowship in that moment was established between them. Glee took her place promptly at the little instrument and struck at once into the stirring strains of a patriotic song. The first fifteen minutes of these evenings were habitually given to the singing of lively and popular songs, an exercise in which the people were wont to join with hearty good-will.

To-night, however, the singing was feeble, and interrupted by frequent cat-calls and whistles from the group at the door, among whom Holt now observed the oxlike figure of Bob Lorish, son of the innkeeper, a big, brutal-looking fellow.

Holt knew then with whom he had to reckon, and from Bob Lorish he never once took his eye.

The third attempt, this time to sing "Tenting To-night," a song which had never before failed to rally all the voices, fell hopelessly flat. Heads were continually turning to look behind, and no one seemed to be in the mood for singing. The sulky offishness seemed fast turning into open antagonism. Glee rose from the melodeon and spoke to a gentle-faced girl who immediately came forward and took her place there. Then in a clear, ringing voice, much to Holt's surprise, full facing them all, she said with her brilliant smile: "The chorus-singing seems not to go very well to-night. I will sing alone once, and then we will try again."

Every eye in the room was fixed upon the girl as she stood lightly, with lifted head and shining eyes like some pure, untamed, but unaffrighted bird wondering at those who could do it wrong. As they watched her a fascinated hush held the room, and through it floated now the heart-searching, half-forgotten strains of that old song of inimitable tenderness, "The Irish Emigrant's Lament."

Glee's voice, of no great range, had the quality peculiar to some alto voices of touching, almost mysterious pathos. This quality was strangely enhanced at the moment by her inner excitement, and Holt, intensely watchful, saw as she sang the last words of the opening stanza, —

"The red was on your lip, Mary,
And the love-light in your eye,"

that she was capturing the sympathy of the whole company.

" 'Tis but a step down yonder lane,
The little church stands near —
The church where we were wed, Mary —
I see the spire from here ;

“ But the graveyard lies between, Mary, —
My step might break your rest, —
For I’ve laid you, darling, down to sleep
With your baby on your breast.”

The exquisite simplicity, the heart-break in the lines, with the potent spell of homely familiarity to many of those hard-faced men and women added, produced an overmastering effect. The coarse excitement under which they had begun the hour was forgotten. Tears rolled down many furrowed cheeks, and rough hands were passed across misty eyes. There was a pause while a few strains of interlude were touched, and then, at the moment when Glee’s lips parted to begin another stanza, with a sharp hissing of the air, a missile, aimed evidently at Holt, who sat on the platform a few feet behind her, whizzed near the girl’s head, so close as to touch the soft waves of her hair.

But Holt was playing the game, too. No motion of Lorish’s had escaped him, and he had not been on his ’Varsity nine three years for nothing. Swift as an arrow his long arm



"EVERY EYE IN THE ROOM WAS FIXED UPON THE GIRL."

was out, and he caught the missile, a thick, empty bottle, in his strong fingers before it could do its work. Then, while those looking on were wondering what had happened, he had measured the length of the room and reached the door. There was a scurrying away of heavy feet down the outer entry and staircase before him, but at the head of the stairs was Bob Lorish, his face purple, his teeth set, ready to stand his ground.

“I’ll teach you to come down here to the Ledge meddlin’ with what ain’t none of your —— business,” he began.

Before he could proceed farther, Holt, saying dispassionately, “Another time, my friend,” had grappled him by the collar and tripped him by a powerful kick administered to his ankles, and so with one mighty motion had flung him down the short flight of stairs. He turned then, reëntered the hall, bolting the door securely after him.

Strange, almost a miracle he thought it, instead of the little audience within being broken up into tumult and confusion, save for

a few youngsters on the back rows, all sat in spellbound silence, and there, white as her handkerchief, with great lambent eyes and dauntless courage, her head held a little higher, her bearing a shade firmer than before, stood Glee and sang on in that soft, pathetic voice : —

“I’m very lonely now, Mary, —
For the poor make no new friends;
But oh! they love the better still
The few our Father sends.
And you were all I had, Mary,
My blessing and my pride;
There’s nothing left to care for now
Since my poor Mary died.”

Murray Holt stood at the girl’s side as the last notes trembled from her lips. Both the strength and the weakness of her responded mysteriously to his presence, all-dedicated to her support, supremely reverent of herself, and yet sternly still, — no look, no touch, no word seeking to make his emotion known to her. Glee perceived in a swift flash of illumination, that what she had done was

to the man at her side beyond praise, above comment, and the perception seemed to flood her consciousness, as she stood there, with unspeakable joy.

At a word of command from Holt the people stood and sang in unison a verse of a well-known hymn.

Glee had thought he would have dismissed them next; that to continue the meeting would have been impossible; but to her surprise Holt opened his Bible and with a manner only unusual by its great quietness, began to read.

It was as if all that had gone before had but served to deepen in Holt's heart the great pity for the hard and bitter conditions of life which could breed such hatred and violence. It was as if he had come to the Ledge for this very hour, for, proceeding from the words he had read, he spoke to the people on the Great Sacrifice as they had never heard him speak before, not alluding, even remotely, to the disturbing scene just past, nor calling notice to himself by any assump-

tion of unwonted force or fearlessness. The marvel of his utterance was its tenderness, its burden of compassion and sympathy, its yearning to draw his hearers to the Cross of Christ.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BRIDGE AND A STAR

"PLEASE let us walk on and meet the carriage, Mr. Holt. I cannot stay here any longer."

Glee's voice shook a little, and her face, in the flare of the kerosene light shining through smoke-blackened glass, showed paler than its wont. It was half-past eight and over. The meeting had been carried on without interruption, and had closed; the people had scattered. They two stood alone in the small passage at the foot of the hall stairs. Through the open doorway they saw the lights in the Sunflower Tavern opposite, the restless swinging of the silent doors, and heard the continuous sounds of vulgar revelry.

They had waited ten minutes for the Cushier's coachman, and still he did not come.

From time to time they could hear foot-

steps approaching stealthily up the dark alley at the side of the place where they stood, but no one appeared. Then the footsteps would be heard again in rapid retreat. A public carriage had now driven up before the Sunflower, and out of it Glee had seen a tipsy party, three girls in tawdry finery and a man, alight and enter the place.

"No, you cannot stay here. I am tremendously sorry it has happened thus," and Holt, hastily turning out the light, followed Glee out into the darkness and closed the door.

She had wondered at this evident reluctance. Surely they were not safer in this place than they would be on the high road. She did not know that just before they left the hall above there had been thrust into Holt's hand, by whom he could not discover, a slip of paper, soiled and crumpled, on which was scrawled, "Don't go home over the bridge to-night." The only other way to return to Heathfield was long and circuitous, and unknown to him. The distance to Heathfield by the direct road, that leading over

the bridge, was two miles. The Cushier carriage would, of course, be coming by the bridge.

This warning might mean nothing. It might even mean a trick to induce him to seem to play the coward and take the unfamiliar road. It had, however, given Holt cause for hot and hasty thinking during the last ten minutes. Glee had been eager enough for the sound of her own carriage wheels, but Holt had listened for them with far deeper anxiety. However, come what might, Glee could not be kept another moment standing in the doorway. They would go.

Holt drew Glee's hand within his arm and held it firmly there, and so they started out, under the October sky throbbing with stars, into the sweet night air of the country.

They had never walked together before. The close shoulder to shoulder forward motion in firm and even step through the darkness and solitude; the profoundly moving experiences through which they had just passed together; the new sense of Holt's power and purpose which the service had

given Glee, and his own unspoken sense of possible peril for her just ahead, drew them mightily together, and more deeply than years of ordinary acquaintance could have done.

The air was fragrant and filled with the low hum of night insects, and the late clover fields on either side the road were drenched with dew.

"I could walk on like this forever!" a voice cried in Glee's heart.

The contact of her hand with Holt's strong arm seemed to energize her as if with a magic inflow of joyous vigor. And for him, the secret consciousness that every ounce of his manhood might be needed in another moment in her defence thrilled him with a tumult of emotion in which dread and exultation were fiercely mingled.

"Will you do whatever I tell you, no matter what comes?" he asked abruptly, with a sudden impulse as they neared the bridge, sunk in its bushy hollow. The rapt stillness of the autumn night was still unbroken by the longed-for sound of wheels.

Glee's heart beat hard. She had no idea what the question signified — why it was asked — and yet it did not seem exactly strange to her, or rather it was only strange where everything was strange, where the gleaming heavens seemed to have taken on a new glory and the dark earth a new mystery. Was it not a part of the fathomless enfolding of protection, half human, half divine, into which she felt herself entering?

“Yes,” she said simply, “I will.”

They had reached the point where the road descended somewhat sharply to cross the brook which here was broad and several feet in depth. Tall bushes loaded with crests of purple berries grew thickly on each side of the road down to the water's edge, and began again on the opposite side of the stream.

Holt had stopped. The bridge — a rude structure of unprotected planks — lay bare and empty in the starlight. No sound or motion broke the hush; no sound, he perceived to his disappointment, of approaching wheels. Nothing could seem simpler or

safer than to walk on; and yet, who could tell what those clustering bushes concealed?

"Why do you stop here?" asked Glee, unsuspectingly. He had been silent regarding his apprehension, not wishing to alarm her if it might be avoided.

"We will not stop," he said; but his heart pounded against his side like a powerful engine as he walked on, tense of muscle and vigilant of eye, down between the bushes which closed thick and dark about them, leaving only a strip of sky above their heads, and all the world shut out.

They had reached the bridge and trodden the first loose, rattling plank when with rapid movement a sequence of dark, ominous figures in a rather ghastly sort of silence moved out from the bushes on the farther side and slowly approached them, while steps behind them and a hasty glance over his shoulder showed Holt that an equal number of rough, shambling shapes had emerged from the elders just behind, where they must have been crouching.

"What is it?" whispered Glee, clutching Holt's arm convulsively in sheer terror.

"It is uncommonly poor raw material. To be exact, it is our friend Lorish and his clan," said Holt, imperturbably. "Remember what you promised."

Holding Glee's hand yet more firmly within his arm he advanced to the middle of the bridge. Glee noted distinctly just then how heavily sweet were the late clover blossoms beyond the brook, and how one star, like a drop of light, seemed falling down the sky to rest above them.

Evidently the presence of the lady was unexpected and disconcerting to the plan of attack, but Lorish, nothing daunted, stepped out from the squad at the bridge's farther end with all the coarse swagger of a bully, and with sulky, lowering brow shouted with an oath: "Come on, parson! Me an' you's got to fight. Brace up now, and look alive, if you ain't afraid!"

Holt looked the fellow square in his inflamed, uneasy eyes with stern, unsparing

scorn. "You are right, Lorish," he said with sharp emphasis, "you and I have got to fight, and fight we will. But you must let me take this lady home first."

Then from both the shambling groups on the bridge which had now nearly met in an irregular circle around these two, there went up a shrill, derisive yell started by Lorish, a yell of low, taunting contempt: "Ho, yes! That's what I told you, fellers," cried Lorish, with a brutal sneer. "He'll get out of fighting somehow; them was my words, and you bet he wouldn't, Jim McCurdy. What d'ye say now, heh?"

Before Holt could make his voice heard through the noise Lorish shouted again: "We'll see the lady home! Never you fear! But since you're afraid to fight—what d'ye say, boys, let's chuck him overboard and cool his head a little in the crick? Wouldn't that be healthy for that kind of a milksop that hides behind a petticoat, heh?"

Holt, at a white heat of anger which seemed to make the bridge and its evil circle

whirl about him, and yet outwardly self-possessed, had loosened his hold of Glee's hand, and she, clinging now to his sleeve like a child, saw to her wonder that he was swiftly removing his watch and chain from their place.

"Holloa, Jim McCurdy," he called; "you're a fairly decent fellow. You'll have to stand for me here a few minutes." Jim stared at him in blank amazement as he now placed in his clumsy and unwilling hand the valuable watch and chain.

Holt then drew Glee's hand again within the protection of his arm. "Come," he said to her gently, "we will go now." Then in another tone: "Lorish, I have left my watch with Jim as a pledge of my return as soon as I have taken this lady to her home. Meet me here in three-quarters of an hour. I am mighty sorry to put off the pleasure of thrashing you as you deserve for even five minutes, but"—at the moment he detected the distant sound of carriage wheels on the road beyond—"fortunately, I believe I can

make it in half an hour. I rely on finding you here then."

With these words, Glee on his arm, Holt strode straight ahead, the young ruffians overawed, falling away on either side, Lorish shaking his fist fiercely after him, but not venturing to intercept his progress. And just above Glee saw the star, still falling down the sky like a drop of heavenly light, to rest above them.

A moment later she cried, "Oh, thank the Lord," beginning then to falter a little, "there is Thomas!" For the carriage had, in fact, just reached the brow of the little ascent beyond the bridge, and in a few seconds more Glee found herself safely seated in it, Holt by her side.

"Drive as fast as possible, please," was his word to the coachman.

"I am awfully sorry to have had you share in all this trouble," he then said compassionately to Glee, for she was trembling violently, and her breath came quick and panting. She could not speak.

As they rushed on in the heavy dusk, trees and fences flying past them, the clear autumn air cooling their faces, Glee, however, grew calmer and began to wonder that the man beside her spoke no more, asked nothing as to her welfare, but let her have out her reaction of excitement and terror all to herself. Looking up, she saw his face in the starlight, and for a moment she was appalled at the passion of still anger which it showed. He seemed to be forcing himself to silence, but his compressed lips, fixed gaze, and the hard clenched hands showed the mighty wrath of a strong man brought to bay by cowards.

They were entering the limits of the town before Holt spoke. Then he roused himself with a perceptible effort, his attitude and his face relaxed, and he seemed once more to take cognizance of his companion.

Bending to look into her face he said humbly: "I am ashamed to have been so blithering mad at their daring to do you this violence that I forgot your presence

itself for a moment. I have learned something in the way of courage! I would not have believed a girl could have held herself as you have done to-night. But now you will be ill, and I feel so desperately guilty — I can never forgive myself!”

“Oh, never mind me,” she gasped, buoyed up now by the perception that his fury had been for her, not for himself; “but please, Mr. Holt, promise me that you won’t go back to those awful men. They are frightful. They will all set upon you at once.”

“Oh, no; they will put up a fair fight,” he said, laughing; “they are not half so bad as you think.”

“They are thugs!” she cried vindictively.

“By no means, Miss Cushier. Lorish, I grant you, is pure thug, but the others would be halfway, perhaps two-thirds, decent fellows if that tavern were out of the way. Jim McCurdy might even make a gentleman in time. Did you notice that he touched his hat to me when I put my watch in his hand?”

"I should think he would," murmured Glee, inaudibly, and thought that Murray Holt perhaps could even make a gentleman out of a thug.

There was silence then as they drove onward at full speed through the darkness, and in another moment Glee saw that they were turning in at her own gate.

Holt sprang from the carriage as they drew up before the familiar veranda and, seeing her weakness, lifted her bodily, as if she had been a child, placed her on the floor of it and rang the bell.

"And now you will let the carriage take you safe home," she pleaded, looking up, still white and trembling, into his face.

"Oh, thank you," he said in the most unemotional of tones, "you are very kind. But I have an engagement, you remember, with Mr. Lorish." Then, the maid appearing, he simply added as he stood, hat in hand, "I hope you will be able to rest. Good night," and not pausing for further discussion he hastened with long strides across

the lawn and immediately disappeared in the direction of the Ledge.

Glee, not waiting to explain or describe her adventure, not even asking why Thomas had been fifteen minutes late in calling for her, hastened to her room. There, kneeling in her deep, low window-seat, she looked long out into the fragrant gloom of the garden, saw the star which had watched above them but now on the little bridge, and prayed for the man who was hastening back there to what, who could guess? The star seemed to give her answer, "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee."

Under her breath she said, as her father had once said to her, "Murray Holt is a man." And with bright tears falling unchecked down her cheeks, she added, "Thank God, I have known him at last."

Then, with a sudden thought and a touch of irrepressible scorn, "Not just the stuff that the Over-soul makes slaves of! How slow, oh, how slow I have been!"

CHAPTER XV

MISS CUSHIER RUNS AFTER THE MINISTER

It was after seven when Glee opened her eyes next morning in her tower chamber. She sprang to her feet, threw open her blinds, beheld a dazzling day, and then all at once, the scenes of the night before came back to her. A sense of the danger to Murray Holt in his unknown encounter with Lorish and his clan made her heart beat hard with painful dread. With a white face and a little tremor of anxiety about her lips she went down to breakfast. A boy at the house door was delivering a note, which the maid at once handed to her. It was from Holt himself, a few hurried words to apologize for his inability to call and inquire for her welfare, as he was most anxious to do; but an engagement at Princeton made it

necessary for him to take the eight o'clock train to New York. That was all: not a word as to his own experience of the night before. Naturally, he must be alive, however, and in fairly good condition. What could be more like him, thought Glee, than wholly to ignore any possible peril to himself, any possible interest in him on her part? But how good of him, how thoughtful in this simple way to save her further anxiety! She sent back the brief reply the note demanded, assuring him that she was in no way the worse for their adventure.

Hardly was breakfast over when Cecil Compton crossed her lawn and called Glee out to see some late roses she had found still blooming in her garden.

The two girls stood together at the wicket gate in the warm October sun which showed Glee's face still pale and her eyes unwontedly dark and hollow.

"Why, Glee!" exclaimed Cecil, "you look positively ill. What is the matter? You must have had a dreadful time out at the

Ledge meeting last night. Tell me, honestly, all about it."

Glee gave her a very mild and harmless account of last night's proceedings, to which Cecil listened with keen interest.

"I should think Mr. Holt would have enough now of all this temperance business," she remarked. "Honestly, Glee, don't you think he has carried things altogether too far? Of course it is all right for a minister to be a temperance man, but when it comes to mixing in these horrid political matters —" Cecil hesitated, feeling a little at sea on the subject, and Glee smiled slightly, recognizing the echo of Laurence Compton's opinions. She was, however, at a loss to account for this sudden revulsion on her friend's part.

Cecil had the night before, in fact, undergone an ordeal of brotherly plain speaking from which she had come forth chastened and subdued. She had been told in good set terms that she had thrown herself at Mr. Holt's head, and all for nothing, and it was time to come to her senses. She could not be

so insane as to discard chances plainly hers — a marriage into New York's Four Hundred among them — for the sake of this hot-headed parson! And even if she could, it would avail her nothing, etc., etc.

This was enough to bring any sensible girl to a right-about face. Cecil had promptly declared herself ready to close the Heathfield house the first of November, and depart with her family for New York, where a brilliant season and a no less brilliant marriage engagement, she had reason to believe, awaited her.

Consequently Heathfield interests, and with them those of the Reverend Murray Holt, had sunk that morning to a somewhat tame and low level. Glee felt this distinctly, and it did not seem to her worth while to attempt to prove to Cecil that Mr. Holt had gained a notable victory, and had every encouragement for pressing on in the work of rescue and purification which he had begun single-handed at the Ledge.

"I do not think Mr. Holt is a man who

changes his mind or his plans very easily," was all her response.

Cecil nodded emphatically.

"That is exactly the trouble. It is a pity he *is* so obstinate. He might have stayed in Heathfield indefinitely."

Glee looked up quickly.

"Might have stayed! What do you mean, Cecil?"

"Oh, then you didn't know that he is to resign as pastor of our church! I might have thought, of course, that you could not have heard. He has found out, you see, that some of the prominent members think it best. Brother had a letter from him this morning about it. It is all settled, I suppose," Cecil added demurely.

Glee's color had changed swiftly, but she held herself well in hand. "It seems rather sudden," was her careless comment; but as she turned back a moment later to her own house her spirit was in a strong tumult of perplexity, pain, and indignation.

Mrs. Cushier perceived plainly that Glee

was undergoing some strongly emotional experience. She succeeded in drawing from her a sufficient description of recent occurrences to strengthen her own growing conviction, that her dear "pleached alley" was destined never to exist save in imagination. To this she resigned herself not without a pang, but with the philosophic conclusion that,

"When half-gods go
The gods arrive."

* * * * * * *

That evening there was a large reception at the Binneys, to which Glee went with her mother, solely because she hoped that Murray Holt would be there, and she could assure herself that he had come out unscathed from his last night's encounter. Furthermore, she might even gather courage to ask him if it were true that he intended to resign, and why, and whether he were sure that this was not an impulsive, premature step.

Although the Cushiers were late in arriving, Glee could find no sign that Holt had come, or even that his coming was expected. A

wretched sinking of disappointment, a weary distaste of the whole brilliant gathering fairly frightened her, as tokens of a depth of feeling in her own heart until the last twenty-four hours quite unknown to herself.

Having refused repeatedly to join the dancing, Glee endeavored to keep out of sight of her friends in the seclusion of a nook deeply draped in Moorish hangings. Here she found herself, a half-hour after her arrival, confronted by her host, Mr. Binney, with his ruddy face, prominent eyes, big white mustache, and the unmistakable air of command which long-enjoyed power and prosperity are wont to give a man.

"You here and alone, Glee Cushier!" he exclaimed. "Well, well. This will never do. Have pity on these poor boys. I saw you turn them away, one after the other."

"Oh, but you must have pity upon me to-night, Mr. Binney," cried Glee, making a place for him by her side on the divan. "I am really a little bit tired and like to sit still and talk with men of mature mind," and she

smiled roguishly up at him, "instead of whirling around the room with those — elementary intelligences, shall we say?"

Mr. Binney laughed, not ill pleased. Glee was a favorite of his, and her preference flattered him.

"I wonder where Holt is to-night," he said suddenly, with his peculiar bluff unceremoniousness.

Glee's heart gave a sudden mighty throb.

"Plague take the fellow," continued her host, growling under his mustache; "I am all out of patience with him. Here he has sent in his resignation as pastor to me as chairman of the official board, like lightning out of a clear sky! Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous?"

"Then that is really true?" asked Glee, not daring to look up for fear her eyes should betray her eagerness. "Somebody said to me that he had been asked to resign. If so, one can hardly blame him."

Mr. Binney gave an indignant sniff. "Nobody could ever have dreamed of suggesting

such a thing to him unless it was Compton. Compton ought to go to Carlsbad and take the waters for his liver! He has some of the most bilious, jaundiced prejudices I ever came across. It all comes of being born to the purple. He ought to belong to the English nobility. We're not aristocratic enough for him over here. Because he saw a few Italian children coming into the sacred precincts of the Old North Church to Sunday-school one day, his fastidious instincts were all up in alarm. He was sure that Holt was getting ready for a regular French Revolution here, in which all the aristocratic heads would come off."

Glee laughed merrily. "Poor Mr. Compton!"

"Oh, yes. He is easily scared. Then the crown of Holt's offending seems to be that he had the grit and the grace, which no other man in Heathfield had, to tackle that hole out at the Ledge and clean it out. The best thing Holt ever did in his life, and the pluckiest! But Compton is not exactly a pioneer in tem-

perance matters himself, and what he wants, anyway, is a kind of kid-glove parson, a carpet knight, a man to dance attendance at afternoon teas, and let the world go to destruction as fast as it has a mind to."

"That is not quite Mr. Holt's fashion of a man, I should think," said Glee, with fine impartiality.

"Not exactly. Somehow or other, Compton keeps that part of it dark—but he contrived to let Holt know that he felt him something of a misfit here; was afraid, in short, that he might run the church on too Christlike a basis, and convinced him that others shared his opinion. So what does Holt do but resign out of hand, not waiting, you can believe, to be asked twice, and this morning I get his statement."

Glee's eyes spoke her sympathetic interest. She had forgotten to keep them downcast.

"Well," continued Mr. Binney, "I'll say for the young man that I never read a manlier document. Upon my word, Holt is the straightest fellow I ever met, and I told Compton so, and dared him to deny it. But

bless me, here he is this minute! Well, well," and Mr. Binney rose with outstretched hand to welcome Murray Holt, who approached with an apology for coming at so late an hour.

As he met Glee Mr. Binney caught the swift change in both their faces, and slipped away, exclaiming to himself as he went, "Oh, ho! I see it all now! The parson is cutting Compton out with Glee. That is what has made him so anxious for his removal. All is fair, they say, in love and war, but I confess I don't like my neighbor's methods."

Holt took Mr. Binney's place beside Glee in response to an eloquent motion of her hand.

"Then that dreadful Lorish did not kill you?" she asked, her breath coming quicker just then.

"No," he replied. "I never felt more alive."

"Tell me seriously, Mr. Holt, everything that happened."

"It was really nothing whatever, Miss Cushier."

"Tell me about it," she commanded imperiously. "Were they all waiting for you?"

"Yes," he said. "The only interesting

feature of the occasion was the way the fellows had been betting on what I would do. Jim McCurdy swore by me straight through. I think he was magnetized by the watch, for he seems to have enlisted permanently under my banner."

"A henchman! How nice."

"The rest of them had various opinions," he continued. "An ingenious theory — of Lorish's, I think — was that I had put the watch into their hands so as to convict them of highway robbery and was coming back presently with a 'copper' — do you understand the term?" Glee nodded — "or a posse of them, sheriff and all, to take them into custody. You see the fellow has imagination!"

"That is what lots of men would have done," declared Glee, oracularly.

"I do not think any of them but McCurdy expected me to come back alone."

"Of course not. They supposed you had common-sense. But hurry and tell me what followed. What did you do?"

"Why, what I went to do, naturally.

Thrashed Lorish, and threw him into the brook afterward for the bath he so much needed. The fellows cheered, of course. That is the whole of it. Don't let us talk about the hateful business any more."

Holt's face wore the gravity which Glee had found already was not to be trifled with. Plainly the whole memory of the incident was disgusting to him.

"Now tell me," he said very gently, looking with anxious eyes into her face, "have you forgiven me for letting you get into such a wretched predicament? Are you not completely exhausted?"

"I am perfectly well," she returned, looking up with a smile in her frank eyes.

For an instant she met an eager response in his, but in that very instant he rose with an indefinable change of manner.

"I am exceedingly glad. It is a — relief — to see you, to find you — like yourself altogether. But you must not let me keep you here. Will you go to the dining room?" and he offered his arm with formal courtesy.

As they passed down the brilliant, crowded rooms Glee was keenly conscious of the contrast with the evening before, when she had walked beside him in the wild, sweet darkness of the autumn night. Why were they so near together then, and now so far apart?

In the dining room they were soon surrounded with a gay group of acquaintances, and Glee noticed with surprise the weariness and pallor of Holt's face, his silence and constraint.

In a few moments he excused himself and she saw him no more.

Glee went home with an aching in her heart as of a deep and hidden wound. It was a strange sensation, like nothing she had ever known, and although pride and will rebelled against it passionately, both were overthrown. With wide, wakeful eyes she lay sleepless through the night, her untamed, rebellious heart learning the control of its new master. Tears flowed quietly, unchecked in the darkness, tears in which her childhood, departing, mingled with her womanhood in its advent of power.

What had happened? Why had this meeting with Murray Holt, of which she had vaguely expected so much after that intimate experience, meant nothing? Why were they farther apart than before, even than in the time when there were drawn swords of prejudice and avoidance between them? Why did she resent his coldness, scorn his indifference, vow she hoped never to see him again, and yet and in spite of all, feel that life would be little to give for one word of his abrupt, masterful kindness, one look from his stern, clear eyes, one touch of the protecting strength of his hand?

be the act of a craven. No, there was no avoiding the conclusion which stretched like a dead wall across the end of every argument, however hopefully begun: to go in to win her for his wife signified either that his love or his service had become selfish. Either he must will to let her suffer or he must will for himself a life of compromise and ease. All his manhood revolted from either alternative. Only the bleak path of sacrifice remained open. He learned the strength of his passion sufficiently, however, to avoid with diligence all possible encounter with Glee as the week passed. Meanwhile, he stood by his resignation. It must go through now for every reason.

The first week in November brought two days of severe storm. On the afternoon of the second, Holt left his study, which was turned for him into a grim and lonely battleground, and started out to meet the elements instead of his own ceaseless questions. The storm had largely spent itself, but a thin rain fell, and gray clouds were scudding over the

cold face of the sky, while the last stripped leaves were whirled and beaten from the trees by the wind in its buffetings.

Holt, walking abstractedly down Broad Street, paused before the iron gates of the Athenæum and then entered indifferently, mechanically, having no purpose in coming there, no desire or intent to read. But having entered the rotunda, his steps turned involuntarily to the alcove marked "Sociological." He stopped at the entrance with a frown of self-scorning, recognizing the fact that this had all along been his secret objective, unacknowledged to himself. None the less straight in he went, and with a long breath, as of a man who escapes his pursuers, he threw down his hat and dropped upon the low wooden stool in the corner. Time passed, and still Holt sat enclosed by the luxurious privacy of the alcove deep-walled with books, shut in in the hush of this retreat to the dear delight of recollection.

"By absence this good means I gain;
That I can catch her,
Where none can watch her
In some close corner of my brain."

The old half-forgotten lines strayed through his mind. It was weakness, he knew that, but what then? being weakness, he preferred it to strength. He had fought long enough. He would lay down his arms for this short hour.

Here she had sat, had looked up at him, coldly disdainful, hotly defiant, as he had stood and rated her roundly for what he most adored her for,—her withdrawal from himself. How she had tossed her dainty chin upward, and flashed rebellious daring from the depth of her dark eyes; how she had grown meeker after that, bending a little to his unbending; how his whole big frame had thrilled with the perception that he could control her wilfulness, could direct her cooler judgment, and break the stiffness of her opposition and antagonism. When he had asked her to try to forget, as immaterial, the fact of her personal dislike of himself, how piquant had been the charm of her mischievous reply. Then when he had touched the deeper chord of their common religious purpose how she had changed again.

Tears sprang to his own eyes as he saw once more the tender humility which grew in hers, till, driven by the poignancy of his passion, the strong, rugged fellow turned and pressed his lips upon the red-leather labels of the "Penal Institutions," against which the darling head had rested. Giving himself then a mighty shake and coloring with shame at catching himself at such a feat, Murray Holt took his hat and hurried from the place as if his business were of pressing importance. In good truth it was important, but it could be conducted wherever he carried his ego, and having thus far relaxed his guard, he forthwith proceeded in the direction he most desired, but had hitherto most avoided: straight out of Heathfield in the direction of the Cushiers' residence. Swift is the descent into Avernus!

It had stopped raining and the wind had abated with sun-setting. Twilight was falling rapidly. Holt walked on the other side of the lonely street from the home of his parishioner. As he came opposite the Cushiers' gate he stopped and permitted him-

self the sinful indulgence of gazing at the windows of the tower chamber, where a light was burning. The lower part of the house was dark and the garden walks were shadowed by thick shrubbery. Suddenly Holt started. A small figure, wrapped in a cape whose monk-hood was pulled over the head, had appeared at the gate, silently as if it had sprung from the ground. The gate was quickly opened and the small figure, which Holt recognized as that of Gladys, sped on down the walk past the Comptons' just beyond. There was a letter-box at the next corner. As he overtook her, Holt perceived a letter in the girl's hand. He did not wait to discuss with himself the moral advantage of remaining unseen; he hastened to her side as if no other course were possible.

Glee, surprised, turned up a white, wan little face under the dark hood, whose look touched him strangely. She gave him the casual, indifferent greeting he had reason to expect from her.

"Let me drop your letter," said Holt, taking it from her hand as they reached the corner. Then, quite as if it were a matter of course, —

"It is pleasant after the rain; shall we walk on a little?"

It was in fact very unpleasant, — gusty and damp and muddy; but Glee did not demur.

"That letter tells my Boston friends that I will go to them next week for a visit," she remarked, for the sake of saying something. A dreadful embarrassment seemed hovering around, ready to close in upon them at every step.

"How long will your visit be?" asked Murray Holt.

"Oh, I shall stay a month anyway, perhaps longer."

Holt gave an involuntary exclamation.

"So long! Then I shall be gone from Heathfield before you return."

Something in his voice, the alarm of the strong man's first, conquering passion breaking upon it, disarmed Glee's pride.

"Mr. Holt, why do you do this thing?" she asked impulsively. "I cannot understand your leaving Heathfield just when you are most needed, and when your work is beginning to really tell."

"Would you advise me to remain," he asked proudly, "when I have been plainly told that it is the wish of some of my people that I should go?"

"But it is not true!" she cried, the hood falling from her head as she lifted it to look up into his set, stern face. "Everybody knows it is not true. If you go, you will simply let one selfish, scheming man triumph and carry out his evil will. You ought not to go when every one else wants you to stay."

Holt's smile betrayed the warmth her words brought him, but he shook his head.

"Yes," he said, "I ought to go in any case. I must go."

"But why?" urged Glee.

"Oh, why should I explain?" he cried imperiously. "You must understand."

"I? I understand nothing," she answered, but she trembled with mysterious dread as she spoke.

They stopped in the shade of a leafless hedgerow on the lonely road and stood full facing each other in the damp gloom.

"Gladys!"

For the first time Holt spoke her name, but it was not with a lover's tenderness, but with the stress of pain and conflict.

"Do you not see that I cannot longer remain here and hold myself in hand,—here—where I have to see you, feel you near me, you who are so infinitely dear? Once I fancied myself strong enough even for this, but I am far weaker than I thought, else I should not be here now. Have you not seen how I have kept away ever since that night when I knew—how it was with me? I went to Princeton only because I did not trust myself to see you; afterward I determined not to go to the Binneys', and then went, in spite of myself, because I could not stay away. The struggle has gone on ever since, and I know

now the only way for me is to leave Heathfield."

"I think I have not understood. It has not been exactly an easy week — for me," Glee's lip trembled. "And this is all because" — here she stopped short.

"All because the life I must live is too hard for me to ask a woman to share."

"What a pity," sighed Glee, with a little shake of her head, "that women have not courage, and constancy, and character like men! If only they were in earnest, too, and wanted to do some real work in the world, how different everything would be! But, of course," she went on smiling, half wistfully, half quizzically, "they are frail, delicate creatures who ought to be shielded from all the hardships of life and never know a sorrow and never feel a fear. The place for women is in satin-lined boudoirs, reclining on cushions, — a bird and a lap-dog are in order, novels, of course, and flowers" — then with a swift, sudden ripple of her old light laughter she cried : —

"Oh, how did you ever, ever get these ridiculous old ideas about women? I am just as strong and brave and in earnest in my way, and just as determined to do some real work in the world as you, Murray Holt!" and she met his eyes without fear or faltering, her whole face alight with high-hearted courage.

"Glee!" he cried, and caught her hands, looking with mortal earnestness into her eyes. "Listen to me! You must not laugh now. What you say will kill me if you do not mean by it all that it means to me. Say it over again."

"I can't," she said, dropping her head. "Once you said some nice things yourself about me. I have forgotten them, of course,"—and she lifted her head to flash a smile at him through her tears,— "can you remember?"

"Yes."

"Did you believe them?"

"Every word."

"A woman has a right," said Glee, slowly, "to suffer for her faith,—for her

love, — just as much as a man. She is his equal, his comrade, not the weakling you have in mind."

"I want you to try to grasp the idea," began Murray Holt then, with a peculiar slow gentleness, "of what life means to a man who is bound to be most of the time on the side of unpopular causes, who is bent on taking the part of unpopular people, whose time will be spent in doing underground work, not counted or considered in a successful career, and who will not smooth down these purposes even for what is dearer to him than life."

He paused.

"Have you thought it through?" he asked then with the quietness of supreme anxiety.

"Yes."

"Then I ask you, Gladys, could you care enough for me to live such a life, — could you be my wife?"

"Yes," she made answer steadfastly, "because I love you."

Then she found herself drawn with strong enfolding within her lover's arms; her head rested unresisting under the hand which pressed it against his heart, while upon her brow and eyes and lips his kisses fell like rain.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RESIGNATION OF HOLT OF HEATHFIELD

ON the second Friday evening in November the official board of the Old North Church of Heathfield was gathered in the session-room, to consider the resignation of the Reverend Murray Holt. The board consisted of eight gentlemen.

At the head of the massive and polished oak table as chairman, sat Mr. Binney, plethoric and ruddy. At his right was Doctor Cushier. Mr. Compton's place was vacant.

Mr. Binney had begun by tapping an open letter which lay on the table before him with an impatient forefinger and asking gruffly if some one would see that Mr. Holt was sent for.

"You have all seen and considered this document, gentlemen, which has been laid over from a fortnight ago, and which posi-

tively *must* now receive your attention," and he glared somewhat ferociously over his eyeglass at the members of the board, as if they had met for the express purpose of not giving their attention to the matter in hand.

There was a little silence in which Mr. Binney glanced frequently at the door, growling under his mustache that they couldn't do a thing, not a thing, until Holt arrived.

This shortly happened. The young clergyman entered the room with his wonted sturdy, good-humored composure and, at an abrupt but not ungracious motion of the chairman's hand, took the seat left vacant by the absence of Mr. Compton.

"No," said Doctor Cushier to Holt, in answer to a whispered question, "no, Mr. Compton will not be here to-night. In fact, his resignation as a member of the board has just been acted upon."

This was plainly a great surprise to the young pastor.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Binney, irri-

tably, "give your attention, please, to the business next before us, namely, the resignation of the Reverend"—and here he lifted the document on the table and appeared to look anxiously for the signature—"Murray Holt. Couldn't remember your first name, sir," he interjected, nodding over the table in Holt's direction.

"I see," he went on presently, consulting the letter, "that this document sets forth as reasons why the pastor is desirous of being dismissed from his charge here, that he has the fixed conviction that his duty is to be pastor and friend to *all* the people, to the poor and ignorant as well as to the wealthy and favored; that he purposes, wherever he goes, to mingle freely and at his own discretion, with the poorest of his parishioners; to study industrial problems diligently in the light of the Gospel of Christ; and, so far as in him lies, in circumstance and in sympathy, to seek to bridge over the gulf which unhappily now lies between the rich and the poor, believing that in this

direction there is vital necessity for the religion of Christ to be applied.

“He deposes, further,” continued Mr. Binney, who was excessively legal in his phraseology, and whose voice grew ever gruffer, “that he has been led to think that the kind of work he has attempted to do in Heathfield has been unacceptable to this church, and that his efforts against the granting of license, his fraternizing with the operatives, etc., have alienated the sympathies of the strong and substantial members. That, feeling that he has no right to represent a church as pastor and yet act counter to the wishes of that church, it becomes his duty to — in short,” and Mr. Binney knocked off his eyeglass and laid down the paper, — “in short, to take himself off. That’s the gist of it, gentlemen.”

Holt looked at the table; the others looked at Mr. Binney, who now squared himself in his chair and said:—

“As a member of the board, not as chairman, I wish the liberty to ask a few ques-

tions. If the Reverend Murray Holt wishes to befriend the poor, and bear the burdens of the oppressed; if he wishes to live among them as our Saviour lived; if he wishes to fight the liquor traffic and is willing, as we have heard whispered, to give and to take hard knocks; if he seeks to reconcile employer and employed; if he desires to strive, so far as in him lies, to bridge the chasm between the sympathies and interests of the rich and the poor; if, I say," and Mr. Binney having reached the climax of his rounded period, dropped his rhetoric and his eloquence, and pounding fiercely on the table fairly shouted, "if Holt wants to do all this, where on the face of the earth is it needed more than in Heathfield, gentlemen? I can't do it. Compton can't do it. You can't do it, Doctor. I, for one, would like to see Holt try it!"

The young pastor, much amazed at these words of the millionaire, sat with eyes fastened upon him. To him Mr. Binney now proceeded to address himself, with emphatic, lifted forefinger sawing the air.

"I say, Holt—Reverend Murray, excuse me!—we employers know as well as anybody that changes have got to come. Some of us have, by some freak of nature, rudimentary hearts left over after our long industrial war, and God knows!—if there's a way to lift these people out of their bondage to poverty and drudgery, we want to know it.

"I repeat it, changes are bound to come, and I am proud to have a pastor who can think for himself and observe for himself, and give us fellows who are too thick in the dust and noise of business to do it for ourselves, the results of his study and observation.

"So I say to you, young man," and Mr. Binney grew yet crustier and more irascible, "live where you like; fight whom you like; preach in hedges and ditches, if you like; do as you please, only, *stay where you are*. We can't spare you. Do you hear?"

Holt, flushed like a schoolboy who is

taking a raking down from his head-master, rose to his feet with his hands in his pockets, dropped his chin on his breast, essayed to speak, and then, finding that the revulsion of feeling was too much for him to master, bowed and sat down without having uttered a word.

One after the other the different members of the board arose and expressed themselves as of one mind with the chairman, with the exception of Doctor Cushier.

Mr. Binney spoke again, saying that it was a matter of regret to all that Mr. Compton could not see this matter exactly as the rest did, and that he had for that reason withdrawn from the board. The only other member who was non-committal, and of whose hearty acquiescence in the action proposed the board was not assured, was Doctor Cushier. All would be glad to hear from the doctor.

Upon this Doctor Cushier rose, a quiet and yet perplexed smile upon his face.

“The reason I have abstained from taking

part in the discussions which have preceded this meeting and in the measures which have led up to the action proposed by Mr. Binney, is that I have feared to speak from interested motives. The fact is, my friends, I rather think it will have to be owned up to now," and he nodded laughingly across the table to Holt, "the fact is this, the gentleman who is stirring up all this commotion, the gentleman who carries the title-rôle in this little drama of ours, has manifested a desire to stand in the relation of son-in-law to myself." A lively sensation passed around the table upon this declaration, and Holt tried not to look any more exalted than was inevitable.

"This fact, as you yourselves can see, might seem to color my opinions, in regard to the action taken here to-night, but I will leave it to the imagination of you all what those opinions are likely to be. To be perfectly honest, however, I ought to say that I have been led to think that if the church can endure the strain of Mr. Holt's becoming engaged, it can endure any other strain which he is likely

ever to put upon it. Mrs. Cushier has always represented to me that it would create a very serious situation if the pastor should ever contemplate marriage. She faces the situation, now, however, it seems to me, with remarkable courage," he added, with a smile of good-humored irony, and with this still on his lips, sat down.

Murray Holt, steady now, his emotions well in hand, rose to speak, since plainly the next word must come from him. He spoke with the complete absence of rhetoric, of intentional impressiveness, characteristic of him always, with the frank simplicity of a boy, but with the dignity which the seriousness of his purpose always gave him.

"Gentlemen," he said,—"brothers, I am younger than you. You are wiser than I, gentler, more charitable. I feel at this moment, as never before, how raw and crude and headlong I have been in all that I have done,—most of all in my failure rightly to judge my brethren. For I have not dared to hope that you shared my eager

desires, that you could have further patience with my blundering attempts among the poor folk of this place. I thank you for your patience, your generosity to me, for your sympathy in what I want to do if God will show me how. Yes, I will stay," he added with a swift smile, which strangely beautified his rugged face, "and with all my heart, since you will let me do my own work in my own way. I *want* to stay. I want to see some things through.

"Brothers, I have been spending much of my time these months past with poor men. I have, I think, caught their point of view in some degree, seen life from their angle. They are not bitter, they are not resentful, nor revolutionary; they are, in fact, heart-rendingly patient. Can we blame them, if they long to give their wives and children in some sort the sweet and high and noble joys which others command for theirs? I cannot. I am on their side. But I am on yours too. I stand with every man who, in the name of Christ, and in that love

which He came to make visible, seeks to serve and to save those who suffer,—the weak, and those who are gone out of the way.

“The heart of my joy to-night, you know from Doctor Cushier. I am not alone in this pledge and purpose, but beside me, by and by, will stand one whom you all love. She will soften my harshness and impetuosity, we can hope, and smooth out a few of my blunders. With such a hope, I dare to stay in Heathfield.”

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